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By LADY CHARNWOOD

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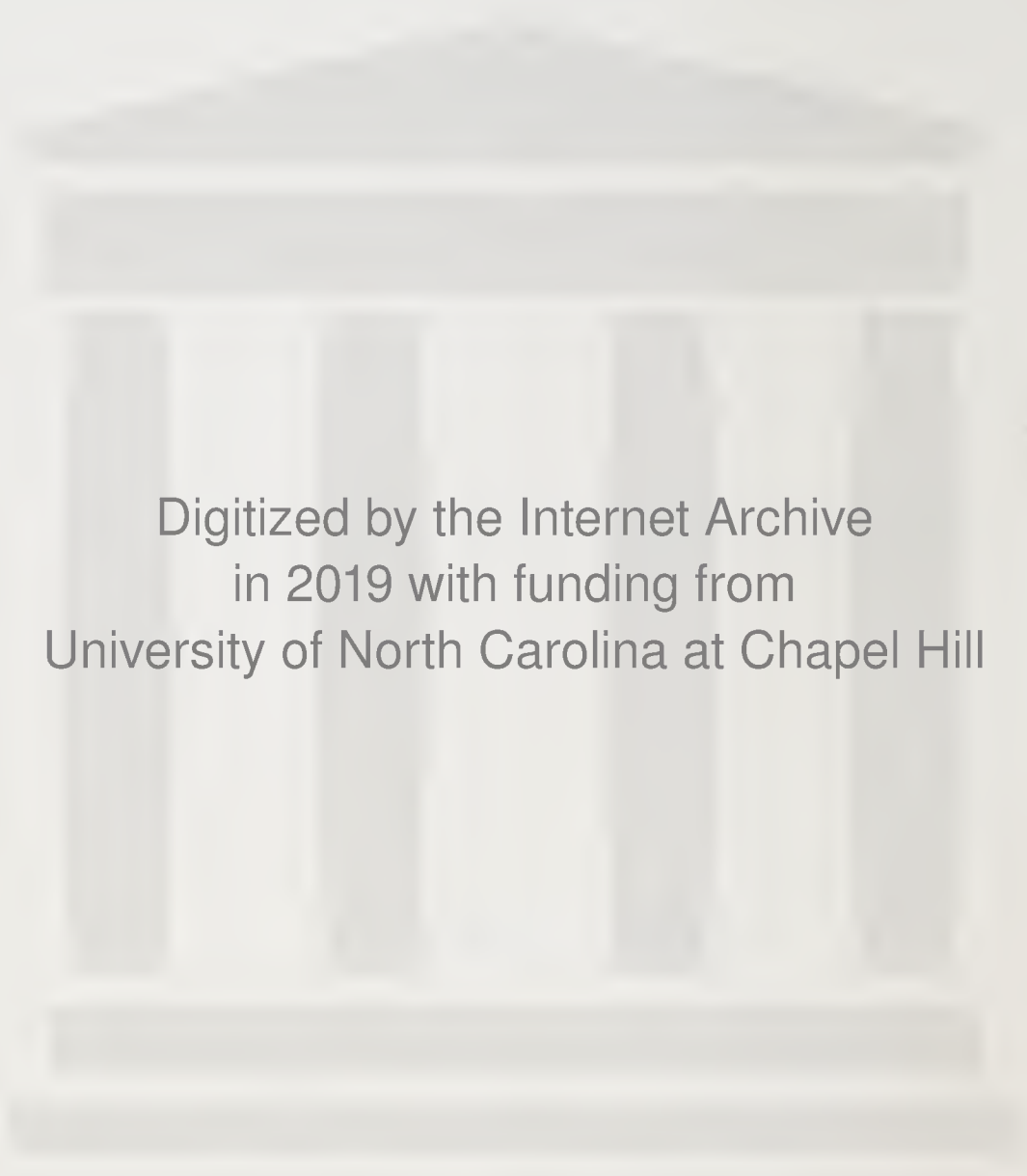
BY
LADY CHARNWOOD

*'And King David said to Ornan,
Nay, but I will verily buy it for the full price.'*

SECOND EDITION

LONDON
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1915



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TO ONE MAN AND TO ONE WOMAN
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
NO LESS IN GRATITUDE THAN IN LOVE

PREFACE

IF any reader doubts the reality of the love which this book attributes to Lord Shelford and to Margaret, then indeed I have told their story ill. For in simple truth many stranger tales than this are founded on fact, and many women have harder tasks. Nor do I claim for Margaret the romantic qualities of a heroine ; she was only a very elementary girl. But at any rate she faced her own life with courage, and did not wait for circumstances to solve the riddle for her.

I suppose that Sterne had better men in mind when he wrote the words which I have fitted to my hero. But they still stand, with some reservations, for my own image of Thomas Shelford.

‘ Whip me such stoics, great Governor of nature ! said I to myself. Wherever thy providence shall place me for the trials of my virtue—whatever is my danger—whatever is my situation—let me feel the movements which rise out of it, and which belong to me as a man.’

D. C.

LONDON,
July 1914.

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CHAPTER I

A BUNCH OF FLOWERS

ON a bleak December evening in 1910 a young man emerged from the Sloane Street station with a white paper parcel held carefully in his left hand. There was nothing striking about his appearance ; he stood about five feet ten, was fair with very bright blue eyes, had a pleasant expression and irregular features. His chin was square and firm ; his nose was straight, if a trifle too short and broad ; and his mouth, which was the best trait in his face, was partially hidden by a blond moustache.

Roger Bamfield's clothes were good, but he was not a well-dressed man. A disciple of the detective school of literature might have guessed—and truly—that he was something of an athlete, for he gave to his boots more care than to all the rest of his wardrobe put together. A government clerk must keep fit all the year round if his holidays are to yield him a good time ; Bamfield remembered Mulvaney's saying, ' A man's no stronger than his

feet.' Certainly this young fellow in the Treasury could join a climbing party and need less time for getting into training than did most men of kindred occupations. A man who skips before breakfast and wears first-rate boots has a great pull over others, especially if he never alludes to either fact. Dipping seven times in Jordan is splendid private discipline, but its description is apt to be tedious.

As this essentially British young man turned the corner into Cliveden Place, a tired-looking woman, carrying a bundle, with her head down, ran against him. She looked up to abuse him, conscious that the collision had been her fault, but as she saw him looking kindly at her, somehow the words changed into 'I 'ope I didn't 'urt your flowers.'

'Not at all, thank you,' said Bamfield, and as the woman went on she murmured, 'Took 'is 'at off to me too ; I 'ope 'is girl is good enough for 'im.'

Elderly women liked Roger, they instinctively trusted him. But girls were inclined to find him dull, and to complain that, in spite of having an Irish mother, he took things too seriously. For his part, he was even more afraid of smart young women than this type of man usually is at eight and twenty.

So, naturally, the woman with the bundle had made a bad shot, and the flowers were intended for an invalid lady who was well over sixty ; this was apparent when he stopped in front of Lady Saintsbury's door in Eaton Terrace. He was shown up

into a pretty little room where a pretty old lady lay on a sofa. Yet the face was not quite a pleasant one ; for its lines betokened selfishness of mind more than age or illness.

‘ Dear Roger, how nice to see you. And what sweet flowers ; it is good of you to spoil an old woman, she’s very grateful.’

Roger took the chair at the foot of her sofa, so that she could see him without turning her head, and he moved it slightly to insure its not touching the couch, which he knew was jarring.

‘ How are you this cold weather ? ’ he asked, and his words, as he waited for the reply, had their full and exact meaning, and were not merely a conversational opening.

‘ It doesn’t make much difference to me, you know, Roger ; I sleep rather worse in extremes of temperature, but this little place is easy to keep warm, and as my bedroom is only through those folding doors, I don’t even go into a passage.’

‘ You are very patient,’ said Roger, and again there was reality in the brief sentence.

‘ Oh I don’t know,’ said the invalid wearily ; ‘ often I wish I had men servants and could be carried to fresh scenes—Dr. Brown says it would greatly improve my general health—instead of having my couch pushed from here to my bed. But I have so much to be thankful for, and especially that the Hursts are coming back. I really could not do with a grown-up girl here, and Margaret’s schooling is done now.’

‘Yes, I know,’ said Roger ‘When does she come back?’

‘To-morrow, just a week before Christmas Day, and her parents come early in February, I hope. You see my hands are very literally tied as far as playing chaperon to a young woman is concerned. It is so awful to be helpless; one feels it less for oneself than for those one loves. I can’t even put these dear flowers in water; ring the bell, Roger, and Susan shall bring me water and a vase; I like to arrange flowers myself, it intensifies my pleasure in them.’ And Lady Saintsbury added: ‘Try and value your youth and strength, Roger, though I fear that some people take it as a matter of course.’

‘I hope I do value them,’ said Roger. There was a suggestion of latent force about him, as there generally is about simplicity and sincerity. His hearer shook her head plaintively and then she sighed.

Plaintive was the word for Lady Saintsbury; no one could say of her, except on the rarest occasions, that she was fretful, complaining or irritable. And yet she had real excuse to bemoan herself. When her husband died, she was still a handsome woman, though in the late fifties. She determined to play a part in her world, if possible an interesting one, for she was cleverer where she herself was concerned than she was for others. She took the little house in Eaton Terrace, and furnished it with some of the smaller, daintier things from the country mansion; her husband had left her

the use for life of any of its contents. The family miniatures, the china figures, the old English water-colours, the delicate French furniture, made a refined setting for a woman who knew how to interest her world. People were not slow to predict that she would soon leave her humble dwelling for a new home; for there were plenty of men who were attracted by her. But things turned out far otherwise. She was going to pay a visit to an old neighbour in the country—partly to report to her son how the tenants were treating the family home—when an accident befell her which made her a prisoner for life. She never quite understood how it happened; she was standing on a crowded station looking for a carriage, when somehow a barrow, piled so high with luggage that the porter who was pushing it could not see his way, collided suddenly with a trunk standing on the platform; a big box overbalanced from the barrow and struck Lady Saintsbury. The blow was totally unexpected; she was knocked to one side and fell, not full length, but sideways, on to an empty barrow, in such a way that she was wrenched and twisted, striking her back with terrible violence on the iron frame. Her spine proved to be hopelessly injured, and, though she did not now actually suffer pain, she was an absolute cripple for life. From that day her world had shrunk to a few feet; her only journey had been across the room, when the folding doors opened to let her couch through to her bedside, as she

had told Roger. All this he had known for many years, but he always received Lady Saintsbury's remarks as though they were fresh; there was nothing hypocritical about this; it was only the manifestation of a sympathy that did not grow stale with use. Animals loved Roger, women trusted him, men shared their pursuits with him; he was slow of development, and so far he was interested enough in the world about him to ask nothing more of it for himself. When love came to him, Roger would probably feel it more deeply than if he had worn off its freshness.

After he had helped Lady Saintsbury to have her flowers put to her satisfaction, he stayed talking and listening for some time. Suddenly he startled his hearer, or rather suggested a new thought to her.

'I shall have to learn to think of Margaret as a young lady now, I suppose; she has always been a child to me before, and such a nice one.'

'You've been more than good to her, Roger,' said Lady Saintsbury. 'I don't know what she would have done in the holidays without you and your mother. All the books you've lent her, and the pictures and plays you've taken her to; she would have found it very different if she had only had me, for I am nothing better than a log.'

'That doesn't make you love each other less,' answered Roger, as he prepared to go. 'May we have her as usual on Christmas Day, that's tomorrow week, you know? Irene and Durant are coming.'

Lady Saintsbury assented gladly. 'And I do hope dear Irene will see as much of her as she can ; I never think girls need cool in their friendship just because one has married.'

Roger laughed. 'I quite agree and I'll tell Irene. I hope Margaret's learning won't frighten us all. She has been sheltered from the rubs of life and has had all her time free to work.'

'Yes, the worst of schools is that they don't give much chance for individuality ; they are too protective. A person responsible to others has not a free enough hand to allow much scope, but Margaret has her own character.'

'Margaret has uncommonly fine health,' replied the man, 'and owes much of her moral quality to it. No question which is worth the asking is likely to be satisfactorily settled in this world at any rate, or I should like to ask philosophers how much mind and body can be separated.'

When he had left her, Lady Saintsbury gave herself up to one of our saddest trains of thought, the recalling of unshared memories. Yet nature is more merciful to us than we are to ourselves, and though we most of us have to go through those bad hours, they are not always so painful as they sound. Instinctively we make a case for ourselves, as we remember even our own mistakes, and we give ourselves the credit for what has gone well, whether it is due to us or not.

Perhaps it was because Lady Saintsbury was an adept at making the most of her circumstances

that she enlisted to an uncommon degree the sympathy of her medical man. In him she had a faithful if enlightened henchman. Like many of his profession he saw human life at its worst, and continued to believe both that it had a best and that its best was very good. He knew that Lady Saintsbury had a grasping and selfish nature ; he knew, too, that she possessed patient courage, and a pleasing habit of showing herself to the best advantage, of which she was refreshingly unashamed. She had also what greatly appealed to the man who fought disease day by day, namely an unusually tenacious hold upon life. She struck him in much the same way as a worldly child might have done. He was quite aware that his name was used unblushingly to back up his patient in any whim that occurred to her ; ‘ Dr. Brown says that any agitation is the worst thing possible for me ’ was an invaluable asset to Lady Saintsbury. He was ready to perform many services for her ; he used to ‘ explain things to Margaret ’ as she desired him at the beginning of holidays ; in other words, he put the child on the track of her grandmother’s interests at the moment. Or he would tell the servants anything that it might be unpleasant for their mistress to say ; they were admirable maids, and Lady Saintsbury had far more consideration for their feelings than for those of anybody else. So ‘ I find her ladyship a little tired, Susan ; perhaps when Miss Margaret comes she had better bring a school friend with her, so as not to be too great a tax on her ladyship. They

can just have cake and sandwiches on a tray for supper and not interfere with her ladyship's dinner.' Or 'Her ladyship seems a little low, Susan; do you think she sees enough company? Could you manage if she had a friend to stay for a week; I think she's lonely now that Miss Margaret has gone back to school.' This showed Lady Saintsbury in the graceful position of welcoming the thoughtful suggestions of her old servant, rather than in the ungrateful light of putting extra work on her. Lady Saintsbury's health was generally excellent and Dr. Brown made no charge for most of his visits; he was a bachelor living near to Eaton Terrace, and he often ran in to see the invalid just for their common enjoyment. She liked to 'keep her hand in,' as she called it to herself; she could talk shrewdly and well of a world beyond the young doctor's ken; he was interested by her and by her refined setting. He regarded her as his 'district,' and said that she needed attention as much as some of his poor patients needed food and blankets. And she did not overestimate his opinion of her; she made less effort to produce a pleasing impression on him than on anyone else. 'Most lonely women go in for the clergyman and the doctor,' she said to him one day; 'I only trouble the physician of the body. So he can't be surprised if I work him rather hard, nor complain if I give him jobs not strictly in his line.'

Lady Saintsbury was a fighter, and she could not reproach herself with a facile contentment in her

lot. A woman of good family, with distinguished connections, she had married at twenty-seven a simple country squire, and it was hard luck that her husband's acquiescence in obscurity should be repeated again in her children. She forgot that she had refused men of greater force because they were not sufficiently pliable to satisfy her love of power, and that at last she had accepted Sir Claude because she could dominate him. She now felt that the lack of ambition in those she loved had first spoilt her youth and then disappointed her age. Sir Claude Saintsbury owned a smallish property in the Midlands, which had been for several centuries in his family. Gradually she had learnt that nothing striking could be made of him ; he was a good landlord, an honourable gentleman, a devoted husband, but he could not fill a part on the world's stage. So she had focussed her hopes on her eldest son ; for him she had made herself, and caused his father and the other children to bear, sacrifices out of all proportion to their very moderate means. Harrow, Trinity College (Cambridge), the Diplomatic Service had in turn been called upon for her darling ; in vain Sir Claude assured her that the boy's abilities were not equal to a big career and that in diplomacy he would but fill a shelf ; with all a woman's obstinacy she had been sure he would become an ambassador. Sir Mortimer had really justified her better than anyone expected. He had got on respectably in the service, and lived abroad cheaply with his wife and

young family without anyone fearing that he would be exposed to public failure by becoming minister to even the smallest state. He had let the family place, and his mother's jointure, if small, was regularly paid. His brother, who was considerably younger, took his meagre portion to Canada, where he did well when that country was still comparatively open to English energy. It was characteristic of Lady Saintsbury that, while she always spoke of her gratitude to Providence that her two sons in their different ways upheld their country's flag abroad, she intimated in plaintive accents that her daughter had been persuaded to desert her. About that same daughter words were inadequate to express her feelings. Lady Saintsbury said to herself, 'I really think that Mary has been the greatest disappointment of my life. With her chances she might have married anybody; yes, really anybody. But she was always obstinate. When I found how wrapped up she was in Miss Williams I sent her away. Yet she harked back after all those years, and put Margaret under her. And it was just the same with Jack Hurst. She never looked at another man again.'

There was something to be said for the old lady's outburst, or at any rate there appeared to be. For Mrs. Hurst had really been a beauty, and no one, least of all her mother, could have predicted that at nineteen she would fall violently in love with a poor officer; though many would have foretold that, given the love, she would marry the man of her

choice and share his life wherever it might be passed. Lady Saintsbury had provided her daughter with an irregular education at home ; when that daughter in turn had a child for whom she desired to do the best, she naturally saw the evils of it. But Mrs. Hurst saw no less clearly the far greater evils of the modern boarding-school for girls, that institution invented apparently to give them a taste for the supposed life of a young man, and a distaste for the life that a young woman would normally lead at her parents' home. She always said that without the help of her old governess she could never have left her child and shared her husband's life in India, and she felt with truth that she owed a double debt to Miss Williams. Happily things so fell out that Margaret spent eight years of her life at a school which had, without advertising them, the advantages of home ; a school kept by the governess who had given to her mother the best teaching she had known. For two years Miss Williams had educated Mary Saintsbury ; when the girl was sixteen, and her brother Mortimer fourteen with Harrow expenses beginning, her mother had decided that the cost of a resident governess of that stamp for an only daughter, when there were two sons with so many needs, was a foolish and unjustifiable waste. Miss Williams thereupon obtained an appointment as English teacher in a school at Hamburg ; while there she shared the flat of a German lady who taught at the same institution. Not very long afterwards she inherited a little money from her godfather. Not

unnaturally her friends expected that she would henceforth live in genteel poverty and anxious ease ; but instead of that she united forces with Fräulein Schmidt and put her small capital into the boarding-school which Margaret now failed to realise that she was leaving, not merely for her usual holidays in Eaton Terrace, but for good and all, in order henceforth to share the life of her parents.

At eighteen Margaret Hurst, though inferior in looks to her mother at that age, was nevertheless a very pretty girl. Her mother's features had been more regular, her style more unusual ; her dark hair and eyes and delicate colouring had made her an exquisite picture. Margaret's pretty slight figure lacked the distinction of her mother's height, which was stately without being excessive, but the girl held herself well ; her small head was beautifully set on her rather sloping shoulders. If her nose and mouth were a little too big, they were well formed and handsome, and her eyes were large and beautifully shaped. From under her arched eyebrows, delicate yet distinct, they looked forth with that gaze at once fearless and modest, which is the prerogative of a girl who is unconscious of self. They were technically fine eyes, but they were something more ; they had at times dark rays running from the pupils to the outer rim of the iris which changed colour with the shifting light, and recalled the lines :

Eyes too expressive to be blue.

Too lovely to be grey.

Her hair was brown with varying tints and shades ; it curled naturally and grew as a pretty frame to the charming face ; and her fair skin was tinted with a true rose flush. Yet the total effect of her colouring was not as good as Mrs. Hurst's had been, with her darker hair and still fairer complexion. This, at any rate, was something like Lady Saintsbury's summing up of Margaret, as she stood beside her couch on the day of her final return from school.

' Your mother will have no difficulty in recognising you, Margaret ; in spite of your turned-up hair you look much as you did when she left us last. When was it ? '

' Four years ago, Grannie ; I was only fourteen in 1906. What ages it does seem since then ! '

' Does it, dear ? To me it seems such a short while ! When one gets old, Time doesn't walk, he runs. And I think, as I never change my scene, he appears to race with me. You see there are no landmarks in my life at which he can stop.'

' Poor Gran, and you are so very, very patient.'

Lady Saintsbury smiled, but she sighed too. ' I have had plenty of time to get used to it, you see. And now there's nothing of real importance for me to do. I am glad your father and mother are coming though, Margaret ; I could not take charge of a young girl. I'm sure your holidays have been so dull that you must often have been glad to get back to school.'

' Gran, you mustn't talk like that ; you know

how I have always adored being with you. Of course, I wish Mummie had been at home, but I am sure that no one had nicer holidays than I. And think how kind the Bamfields have always been ! How's Roger ? I expect he will call to-day.'

' My dear child, I told him you were only coming home this afternoon. He'll probably call on Saturday or Sunday, you know quite well how busy he is on other days.'

' He could often get away from the Treasury and be here by six,' answered the girl. ' I want to give him back some books he lent me.'

' You can leave them when you go to his mother, one doesn't return books by loading up the lender. By the way, what did you borrow ? I should have thought Miss Williams had plenty for you to read.'

' Well, he lent me " Cyrano de Bergerac," and some of Andrew Bradley's lectures on Shakespeare ; they mostly have old books at school, you see.'

' Sit down there, where I can see you without turning. You have no idea how tiring it is to strain one's neck to look up or round for a long time, when one's on a sofa.'

Margaret fetched a chair and put it where Lady Saintsbury told her, so that it faced the couch. She moved quietly, for she had been taught not to make a noise or to shake the sofa.

' Talk to me about your life at school, child ; were they sorry to part with you ? '

' I think so ; yes, I'm sure. But I know how

sorry I was to part with them. It seemed so awful that I had done so little, and now all the opportunity was over.'

'I don't know about accomplishing nothing,' answered the old lady. 'You have been head of the school for a year, and Miss Williams wrote that, as well as that, you were the most popular girl she had ever had.'

'Oh well, the others were so awfully good to me, and there was no very great distinction in being the best at lessons there.'

'At any rate you can speak three languages—one of them your own—fluently, correctly, and with a good accent. That's something in these days. Then your Latin master was pleased with you, wasn't he?'

'Yes, I cared most for Latin and drawing and some history courses; I'm bad at music, I'm afraid. You see, we were very well off for masters; Birmingham, Malvern, and Worcester itself all had good teachers. But there were lots of things we didn't learn; no higher mathematics, and practically no science, and we had no golf nor hockey nor cricket, none of the up-to-date things.'

'But you had drill, hadn't you?'

'Yes, but no competition with other schools, and no matches, even in tennis. But we got boating on the river, and riding on the glorious turf about there. I don't believe any other school ever managed so much riding or such good horses.'

‘ Do you ride as well as you promised to when you were small, Margaret ? ’

‘ I think so, I love it more than anything. Shall I get any when Dad and Mum come back ? ’

‘ I don’t know, dear, we must try and manage it sometimes. How nice it is to think we shall have them in a month ! But, of course, your father will be poor ; he won’t have any chance of getting more work, and a colonel’s pension is very small.’ Lady Saintsbury sighed and fell silent ; but Margaret hardly took in her grandmother’s meaning. Her mind turned towards meeting her parents, and she was already lost in the future when her grandmother recalled her to the present by saying :

‘ You get your pretty curly hair from your father, but it’s not such a quantity as your mother’s. She can sit on hers ; how long is yours ? ’

‘ Not quite to my waist, Grannie,’ was the reply ; and then the invalid continued to probe the girl for some time with gentle inquiries as to her size in gloves and shoes, her height and weight, her tastes, her accomplishments, even her feelings about her mother, questions which, without exactly hurting Margaret or causing her to resent them, gave her sensations of surprise. Truly those who teach us in real life are much more difficult to understand than those who teach us in schools, just as their lessons are harder to learn.

Lady Saintsbury often said that she never took offence, and therefore could not understand why other people should do so. She forgot, or refused

to realise, that while no one called the invalid—bravely passing her tedious days on her sofa—to any kind of account, she herself frequently took that liberty with her visitors. Poor lady! she was lonely, elderly, maimed and badly off; no one could grudge her the little self-deceptions which she practised when circumstances had robbed her of the directer workings of worldly ambition. But her daughter never quite understood this; she had real admiration as well as love for her mother, but she never succeeded in being quite in touch with her. When she had heard of Lady Saintsbury's tragedy, Mrs. Hurst had hastened from Ireland where her husband was then quartered; she had put Margaret with Miss Williams and stayed for the best part of a year with her mother. Since then Colonel Hurst had been in India, and although his wife had spent her holidays at home with Lady Saintsbury, she had been very little in England. Truth to tell, the older woman preferred to be alone; an invalid has the right not merely to be the central figure, but to claim undivided attention; another woman in the small house gave her the sense that her preserves were being poached on. It was not so easy for Lady Saintsbury to say to her visitors, 'When one never leaves a sofa one is naturally a vegetarian,' if Mrs. Hurst were present and fully aware that her mother's vegetarianism consisted solely in a life-long dislike of ordinary butcher's meat. Birds, fish, sweetbreads, and similar delicacies appeared on the invalid's tray

regularly and frequently ; after all, there was no reason why Lady Saintsbury should not indulge herself in harmless and ingenious paraphrases if they added zest—however little—to her maimed life, but the indulgence was difficult under the surprised gaze of Mrs. Hurst's beautiful eyes.

There were other ways in which the daughter's company failed to soothe the mother. Mary Hurst found her greatest help in the more advanced services of the Anglican Church. When in London she persuaded her mother to receive the man whose influence she felt beneficial to herself ; the good Father was much impressed by the pathetic figure of his friend's mother, and he took so absolutely for granted that Lady Saintsbury was a suffering angel, put her so unhesitatingly on a high moral pinnacle, that, when he went, he left her with a feeling somewhat akin to irritation that so much should be expected of her. The daughter, who inherited from her unaspiring father a chivalrous loyalty to Lady Saintsbury, never gave house-room in her mind to any suspicions of her mother's good faith, but she could not prevent an atmosphere of strain. Perhaps Mrs. Hurst's eager spirit made her rather a restless companion to an invalid in a small room ; Lady Saintsbury predicted with absolute truth that ' Margaret would turn out a more comfortable woman than Mary.' At times there was an unworldliness about Mrs. Hurst that positively disquieted her mother, but that lady would have been astonished and not a little alarmed had she

suspected that in the girl who had lived such an insignificant and sheltered life there were depths that Mary Hurst was incapable of. Both women had strength of purpose, but Margaret had force of character which would help her to choose her path amid greater difficulties than her mother had ever had to meet. Her powers were slower, but she had a natural simplicity of outlook, with regard both to herself and to others, which bid fair to ripen, as she developed, into a noble capacity for intrinsic truth. To her was possible a steadier view of life, a juster conception of values, than the more intuitive grasp of her mother could achieve or apprehend.

The very next day Mrs. Hurst was to try both her mother and her daughter in a way which was far indeed from the imagination of either.

CHAPTER II

MARGARET'S OLD FRIENDS

‘GRANNIE, here’s the Indian mail,’ said Margaret, as she brought the letter to Lady Saintsbury’s bedside next morning. ‘How good it is to know we shall have something better than letters directly.’

‘Yes, the mail will soon lose interest for us, thank God. I see your mother has written to us both. Take your letter down to breakfast and afterwards we’ll compare budgets.’

Margaret ran downstairs, tearing open the envelope as she went, and this is what she read :

‘MY DEAREST CHILD,—I am sure you will feel my news very, very keenly, and yet you will bear it well. I can safely depend on your courage, not only from the accounts that others give me of you, but because of my own recollections and your constant letters. You know how I have counted on being with you just now, and how it all fitted in so well—Dad’s retirement coinciding with your coming out—and you will realise what a grief it is to me not to be with my only child just when she needs me most. But, Margaret, your father

has been offered a two years' extension of his staff appointment on the frontier, and he thinks it right to accept. I am torn both ways, but I feel I ought to stay with him ; since his last illness I have not been satisfied about his health. Then, if I come home it takes money, and we can actually save where we are ; that weighs with your father as to staying on. I wish I felt quite sure that I was doing right ! Of course, I should not dream of leaving you if my own dear mother were not there ; I know how much you two will be to each other, and what keen joy your devotion will bring to her saddened life. You can go back to Miss Williams for a bit if you like, and take as many or as few of the subjects as you wish. After all, you are only just eighteen. You are sure to have visits to pay to your school friends, and perhaps to Irene Durant ; I still feel inclined to put Bamfield and forget she is married ! My love to her mother and to Roger too. And if you see anything of Miss Shelford, give her my love also ; she and I were great friends once, but her father is an exacting man, and I don't know if she is a free agent and could see much of you, even if she wished. This is all greatly confused, but I can hardly think clearly of anything now except that our parting, which I thought at an end, is to go on for two years more ; pray for me, Margaret, for I feel very weak. Your dear father's face, when I told him I would stay, justified my choice ; the look of strain faded and he seemed years younger, but I would fain

have it both ways—as we all would—and feel that I had not sacrificed child to husband. If this station were like some Indian ones we could have you out, but it is impossible here. Oh, my dear, dear daughter, forgive me if I am doing wrong, and above all, never doubt my love. God bless and keep you. My next letter shall be longer ; it will not be so difficult. Now I must write to Granny.

‘ With Dad’s best love, I am

‘ YOUR DEVOTED MOTHER.

‘ P.S.—I am sadly packing the Christmas gifts I had hoped to bring.’

At first Margaret was so much stunned by the news that she did not really feel it. But as she gradually realised the full force of her misfortune, and, almost immediately after, her own exceptional loneliness, grief seemed to engulf her like a flood, and she wept bitterly. Poor child, many of her tears were doubtless in self-pity, but at her age one does not analyse one’s emotions. After a time the thought of her grandmother struck her, and for the moment brought fresh tears ; for she felt in some undefined way that her mother counted on what did not exist, namely Lady Saintsbury’s pleasure in having her granddaughter about her. Margaret, whose eyes were not holden by the same loyalty as her mother’s, saw that she would be in her grandmother’s way, or, to put the thing at its best, that she would be a weight of anxiety to the

invalid. This thought braced her to self-control. She determined at once not to show her full sorrow at the news; as Lady Saintsbury was thus compelled to share her home with her grandchild she instinctively felt how ungrateful and ungracious she might easily appear. A tolerably composed Margaret went to her grandmother's room after an interval that was really not very long; to receive and recover from a blow takes an appreciable space of time.

Lady Saintsbury's feelings ran on the lines which Margaret had been picturing to herself, but they were even stronger than she had surmised. The invalid felt that she had never really known misfortune before. It is strange how some natures live through tragedy and make the best of it, bowing—as it were—to the inevitable, and yet allow minor ills to take complete possession of them. Probably the needlessness of little evils comes more home to them, and starts a grudge in their minds which is liable to outlast most of their mental furniture. Lady Saintsbury at once wrapped herself in her old resentment at her daughter's marriage, and at what she called her obstinate happiness in it. For Mrs. Hurst had quietly taken for granted that her complete contentment must be obvious to all the world, an attitude which it is difficult to shake because it makes the approach of criticism well-nigh impossible. To do Lady Saintsbury justice she fully meant to keep Margaret in ignorance of her thoughts, a harder matter with sharp-witted youth than age is apt to

realise. She was very fond of her, not only for the child's own sake, but because she afforded the last hope to herself of making the world acknowledge that any success would attend her schemes. If Margaret married well, really well, she would be justified in all the trouble she had taken to keep in touch with those who counted. And she had worked hard and tactfully at retaining valuable links, not an easy matter when she had only a cup of tea to offer her visitors, when all intercourse meant asking to her little house people whom she could not visit in return. The telephone stood on a table behind the long arm of her sofa ; she used it sparingly and effectively. There was some excuse for her feeling that Providence had robbed her of her sphere ; she would have made an admirable hostess on a large scale. Even now she had been prepared to have Margaret and her mother established on the second floor of her little dwelling until they had found their own quarters. Colonel Hurst always stayed at his Club, and had a happy knack of paying attentions to his mother-in-law that did not involve inconvenience to her. His calls were always timed to avoid meals ; he prolonged his visits when he found they were giving pleasure, and shortened them when more important friends were present. Though he had not been much in England, he had shown himself sensitive to Lady Saintsbury's ways, and she had no dread of tactlessness on Jack Hurst's part. But the child alone on her hands ! Why, the double meals would be almost impossible ;

even if Margaret's luncheon were served in the dining-room from the maid's dinner, she would either have to share the invalid's dainties at night, or have a special repast. And she would sometimes have to ask a friend in ; Lady Saintsbury shuddered as she thought of the upsetting of her smoothly working household. And either one of the maids must take her out, or it would be perpetual taxis, and Lady Saintsbury was sure that the allowance Mrs. Hurst mentioned would not be enough to prevent her own resources from being drawn on. Real dismay reigned in her grandmother's mind as Margaret entered, and though she made some effort to hide it, the endeavour was not successful. This was the more natural because she knew at the bottom of her heart that it could all be managed though at cost to herself ; that her friends would help, and that it was open to her to pull this thing out of the fire, as it were, and make a success of it.

That afternoon Lady Saintsbury's heart smote her at the sight of Margaret's set, white face. She knew that she had let the girl see that slight welcome was extended to her, and although on that very account she felt still more irritated with her granddaughter, yet her sense of justice prompted her to let other people be kind to the child, even if she felt unequal to the task herself. She telephoned to Roger Bamfield at the Treasury and explained, to his great astonishment, what Mrs. Hurst's letter had contained that morning. He promised to call for

Margaret as soon as he could get away, and to take her home to dinner with his mother. Lady Saintsbury was much pleased with this arrangement, but to Margaret it only seemed like a desire to be rid of her. True, however, to her resolve not to make things worse, she accepted the decision pleasantly, and her grandmother looked forward to some hours, at any rate, in which she could quietly think things over and rearrange her ways. She thought that perhaps she would send for Dr. Brown.

When Roger arrived he was taken aback at Margaret's changed appearance. How much was due to what he called her 'get-up as a young lady,' and how much to her disappointment about her parents, he had no means of determining. He felt at a disadvantage ; he had seen her only a few months ago, and yet now he was not sure of his ground. So his endeavours to cheer her were shy and ineffectual, and she for her part felt him unsympathetic.

They took an omnibus to Albert Gate, and then walked through the Park and Gardens to Kensington High Street. There Roger hailed a taxi and directed it to a small street behind the Earl's Court Road where he and his mother lived alone since Mrs. Durant's marriage. The walk had been rather a silent one, but Margaret had once or twice realised the sincerity of her companion's interest in her concerns. As they walked in the dark through Kensington Gardens, Roger had said rather suddenly : ' I wonder if I have overdone

you, Margaret? I thought air and exercise would help you, but I think I've given you a cheerless tramp.'

And the girl had replied truthfully that she had been glad of the walk. Perhaps it struck her that she had not been very responsive to the little bids he had made for her confidence, for she added: 'It's been a great relief not to have to make efforts; with Gran I've been so anxious to play up to-day that I'm quite tired out.'

Roger said with more eagerness than so simple a speech required that he hoped she would never feel it incumbent to make efforts in any direction for him, and then the old feeling of his brotherly affection returned to her, at any rate for a moment.

Mrs. Bamfield's overpowering surprise at the Hursts' change of plans made Margaret rather long for Roger's quiet way of taking her parents' arrangements. It always seemed odd to the girl that this vivacious little woman, looking ridiculously young and pretty in spite of her untidy ways, should really be the mother of the rather sedate and stalwart Roger. Mrs. Bamfield was singularly attractive; her tacit assumption that her companions would see things through her eyes was charming to her friends, and if her relations sometimes found it trying, her warm heart and generous mind amply made up for the defect of her happy-go-lucky temperament.

Roger congratulated George Durant on Irene's

talent for housekeeping ; their mother's Irish up-bringing had excluded method from her day's work, but her children took after their English grandmother and attached to the word home the ideas their father had done.

While Mrs. Bamfield was devoting herself to petting Margaret, and putting into her sweet voice such tones of pity and affection that it seemed like soft music, Roger hurried to the cook. He and Irene in self-defence had taken to stocking a store cupboard as a refuge against their mother's erratic memory, and now Roger kept up the habit, and was able to supplement the sketchy meal which Mrs. Bamfield, who ate little, would have offered with unruffled composure to the hungry young people.

When he rejoined them he heard Margaret say ; ' But I really don't think the lamp smells much, and with the firelight it's not a bit dark.'

' And I'm so glad I had just had the fire remade, my darling ; it had gone out while I was reading, but a candle-end works wonders. I love the light of lamps—we always had them at Castle Knock—but, of course, they're bound to smell a tiny bit.'

Roger turned up the flame of the standard lamp that was sulking in a corner. He picked up on his way to it a newspaper, two letters, and a basket of knitting ; he proceeded to chase and find the ball of wool which had run under two chairs. Then he lit the gas at either end of the room with matches from his own pocket. Finally, he carried

the lamp, still smelling vilely, outside to the landing, and Margaret heard him going downstairs.

‘The dear boy’s very handy, but he’s a perfect fidget,’ said his mother, placidly putting on a piece of coal with a black velvet arrangement which she took out of the grate. ‘Now, who can have turned this glove inside out?’ she inquired with interest, taking off the object and extending a blackened hand to Margaret.

Roger was glad to hear the girl laugh as he came in with the lamp, now burning brightly and without smell.

‘How have you managed it?’ asked Margaret; and his mother chimed in with ‘You’re a treasure in a house, Roger; I can’t think how you did it.’

‘I didn’t,’ was the answer, as he put the lamp in its place. ‘I called Sarah and explained what she should do, and saw it done—*voilà tout*.’

‘Well, it seems on its best behaviour just now,’ said his mother, looking with such a droll expression of interest at the lamp that Margaret felt sure that her hostess considered it a sentient being likely at any moment to go off or to go out. She began to laugh; somehow it sounded feeble, and suddenly to her intense surprise she found she was crying. She heard Roger’s voice say ‘I must go upstairs to dress,’ and the next moment his mother’s arms were round her. Oddly enough she didn’t cry long; Mrs. Bamfield was one of those people, by no means so unusual as is generally thought, who,

though inadequate to the daily round, are strong in moments of stress, and in spite of her tears Margaret soon found herself more cheerful. Mrs. Bamfield's doctrine was bracing if her manner was tender, and one at least of her remarks her hearer remembered. The older woman soon realised that Lady Saintsbury's selfishness came between herself and her grandchild, but she told Margaret that there was a double reason why she should be long-suffering with the old lady, for her mother's sake no less than for Lady Saintsbury's own.

‘ Depend upon it, my dear, we shall none of us regret being too kind.’

When Roger left Margaret at the door in Eaton Terrace, he felt a not unreasonable hope that the child was cheered and encouraged. His mother, he knew, watched Lady Saintsbury with a rather merciless, though humorous, gaze. ‘ Mrs. Facing-both-ways ’ she was wont to call her, and Roger recognised the truth of the title. But being himself strong, he was by nature so kindly to the suffering that he had for Lady Saintsbury more patience than might be expected from a young man, and more pity than could be hoped for from a young woman.

He watched the door shut behind Margaret, and said to himself rather wistfully: ‘ I hope the two generations will make the best of each other.’

CHAPTER III

LADY SAINTSBURY IS ANXIOUS

THE following day Lady Saintsbury felt more equal to grappling with the situation. She was no whit less injured at her daughter's conduct in putting Margaret upon her, but she did not despair quite so much of the future as when the blow first fell. What rankled most was Mrs. Hurst's certainty that her mother would welcome the arrangement ; Lady Saintsbury had long wrapped herself up in a cloak of decent selfishness, and this rough pull bid fair to tear a rent in it. Our mental outlook is apt to undergo a change with the return of morning, and a new day made Lady Saintsbury see things in a fresh light. But it presented to her, amid several consoling thoughts, one very alarming idea. Suppose Margaret and Roger should fall in love before the child had seen any one else ? The old lady quietly and methodically went through the list of people in whom she could confide ; she shrewdly felt that a young and active woman would make a better judge of the situation than herself. She had the social instinct in a high degree, and there were very few people to whom she could contemplate

exposing her own affairs. She hesitated long between her distant connection Lady Victoria Vincent, a woman nearly as old as herself, and Miss Shelford, a contemporary of her daughter's with whom she was the more intimate. She decided for the younger woman, and telephoned to beg that if she were still in London Miss Shelford would come and see her. The answer was that Miss Shelford did not leave town until the following day and would be in Eaton Terrace by half-past five. Lady Saintsbury desired to have Margaret out of the house while she talked to Miss Shelford, but she also wished to exhibit her granddaughter for inspection. She therefore arranged that her maid should take Margaret to tea with Irene Durant in Elm Park Gardens ; she did not wish her to go again to the Bamfields'. Margaret was to take a taxi at six o'clock and stay in the dining-room until sent for ; Lady Saintsbury would be told when she returned. One of the things that galled the invalid most was the feeling that her helplessness curtailed her privacy. However much engaged she might be, a *tête-à-tête* was liable to be spoilt by interruptions of a particularly disastrous kind. If she were wanted—dreadful expression—everything had to be transacted before her visitor, she could not leave the room for business and return to take up her talk where it had been broken off. Even the telephone was often a jarring note, in spite of her side of the conversation being the only one heard. Long practice had enabled her to manage that annoying

and indispensable instrument very well, but the fact remained that the poor lady never felt safe from interruption even in her most telling moments.

Lady Saintsbury was also prevented from saying 'not at home.' She did not suffer and her health was good ; if she had not been a safe find she would not have had even as much society as she now managed to get. So she told the maid to say that she had an appointment at half-past five should anyone call before Miss Shelford, and she trusted to luck and Christmas shopping to keep her room empty. Her forecast was correct ; she had her tea alone and considered quietly what help she could get from Elizabeth Shelford.

'When I think what I have done for her in the past she ought to be willing to take some trouble for me now,' she mused ; 'I have always been nice to her father too, even in those awkward years of poor Emma's marriage ; she was my friend, but I never thought it would help her if I quarrelled with her husband. It was much best to see nothing ; she did not make confidences, and after all there is never any real knowledge about that sort of situation. It was a great pity that he married so young and a girl even slightly older than himself and delicate to boot ; of course she had the money. But after she died—and how early she seemed to fade out of life—I certainly did all I could for Elizabeth. And when she grew up and had a brilliant position as head of her father's house I did not trade on the intimacy ; my Mary was married then, and Shelford

immersed himself in politics and business. What a career his has been ! Everything he has touched he has pulled through ; certainly he is more fascinating than any one else and that is a help all down the line. He was charming to me when I was useful about Elizabeth, but he has forgotten my existence much more than she has. Of course, she is Emma's girl as well as his, and it is not strange that she should have the merit of faithfulness.' Lady Saintsbury sighed and then moved on her sofa. ' There's the bell,' she murmured ; ' I hope it's not some one who will be here when Elizabeth arrives.' She had that almost painful sharpness of hearing which sometimes comes when other faculties have been stunted. In this case nature seemed to have developed it in Lady Saintsbury after movement was denied her.

' Miss Shelford,' said the maid, and a rather tall lady, thin and dark, entered the room and kissed her hostess. Elizabeth Shelford might have been any age from five-and-thirty to five-and-forty, as a matter of fact she was midway between the two. She was a striking-looking woman, not far removed from a handsome one, and her figure was undeniably good. Her features were regular although too strongly marked for beauty ; her hair and eyes were dark and her complexion was pale ; her black eyebrows were unusually marked for a woman and made too startling a contrast with her white skin. Her distinctive appearance was to some degree neutralised by her tranquillity of manner ; she was

very quiet, yet gentle did not quite seem the term for any one so capable and self-dependent. Lady Saintsbury, who knew all her circumstances past and present, always felt that Elizabeth Shelford's reserve spoilt her chance of social popularity. Elizabeth knew that now she would never marry. She guarded herself from the mistakes of manner that she saw in other women of her age. She never said too much, seldom made a verbal mistake, and she endeavoured to avoid the strain that makes so many women who are no longer young exert themselves unduly in conversation because they are overtired. But the effect was that she guarded herself too much, and lost all spontaneity. She was a little *pincée*, and when she was with her joyous brilliant father the contrast between her subdued manner and his vitality was particularly striking ; Lady Saintsbury sometimes wondered whether Elizabeth's devotion went the length of consciously acting as a foil to him. For the outlet for her suppressed nature was her love for her father. For him she had the admiration that a child may keep for a wonderful parent who is beyond its sphere ; she yearned over him as a mother does over her little one for whom she cannot do enough ; she understood his strength and his weakness as a loyal wife who is also a friend may sometimes understand. And her days were happy because she thought little of herself and much of the work that she had set herself to do. For her life's task was to help Lord Shelford, against his will if necessary, to make the utmost of his powers. To

this end she gave him unfailing support and ungrudging labour ; for this cause she sometimes opposed him with the courage granted to love. Her eyes were opened to his faults, but her heart was open to his demands. It is questionable whether Lord Shelford ever realised the rare character of her devotion ; he was used to the admiration of women ; but he depended on his daughter, and on no one else.

‘ How good of you to come, Elizabeth,’ said the older woman, ‘ and you must be so busy getting off to-morrow. I am quite ashamed to send for you.’

‘ I am well forward with the migration,’ smiled Miss Shelford ; ‘ even Christmas loses its terrors if one keeps careful lists of presents given and received.’

‘ Oh, my dear, how true that is ! My uncle’s housekeeper had twenty-six shawls when she died ; it was the only gift to an inferior that ever occurred to a Dorlycott’s mind. But what I want to tell you is that the Hursts have entirely changed their plans,’ and Lady Sainsbury plunged into her tale of woe. She was too tactful to complain, but Elizabeth soon saw that she had been sent for to commiserate. True to her habit, she listened with very little comment while her hostess exposed her difficulties. ‘ And you see how hard it is on the maids. I have only the two I have had for years, and a boy in the morning. If one is constantly in attendance on Margaret what is to happen ? I can’t let the child go about alone, and even if I could afford a third servant it would upset Susan and Annie very much to have a stranger.’

Miss Shelford considered. 'I see that it is difficult for you. But surely Margaret could go about by herself until dusk? Every one does now.'

'I don't like it,' said Lady Saintsbury; 'but I suppose I can arrange something,' she added wearily. 'I should like to have some one stopping here when Margaret was with me, and then to let the girl herself pay visits. It would be tolerably easy to have the child and a friend together for a few weeks and to arrange for extra help, and then to let the servants go on quietly again in the old way while Margaret stayed with other people. There are old school-fellows, you know, and friends of Mary's—the Bamfields for instance.'

'I know a young Bamfield in the Treasury,' said Miss Shelford, 'a clever young man and rather nice.'

'Yes, that's the one I mean. His mother is a sister of Helen D'Arcy, the girl that Geoffrey Hurst married; he is my son-in-law's brother, you know.'

'Some of them are clever, those Hursts; isn't one of them the man who writes as John Liverpool?'

'I think so,' said her hostess in an uninterested tone.

'Then Mary's husband is thought highly of in his profession; this very extension proves it.'

Lady Saintsbury passed this over. 'Well,' she continued, 'the Geoffrey Hursts live in Ceylon; he's a tea planter, but long ago Mary saw a good deal of them, and she's very fond of that sister-in-law and of Mrs. Bamfield too. They're Irish women,

and they always seem to me dreadfully typical ones.'

'What do you mean?' inquired Elizabeth, smiling.

'Oh, all charm and no sense,' said Lady Saintsbury, with what struck her hearer as unnecessary irritation.

'At any rate the Treasury clerk has brains,' said Miss Shelford. 'I heard he was uncommonly useful in the preparation of the last Budget. You see he is private secretary to Sir William Gideon, and those great officials always manage to get hold of a really promising man.'

To her surprise Lady Saintsbury almost groaned.

'What's the matter?' asked Miss Shelford.

'Oh, my dear, I'm so much afraid that he and Margaret will fall in love before she has so much as seen another man! It would be so dreadful for me, weighed down as I am with responsibility.' Lady Saintsbury looked so anxious that Elizabeth asked if she had yet seen any signs of the calamity.

'Well, there's been a boy and girl affection that I used to think brotherly,' said the old lady; 'but he's ten years older than she, and I begin to think I've been deceiving myself and that perhaps he's already attracted to her.'

'At any rate there can't be much harm done yet,' said her visitor calmly; 'those boy and girl affairs seldom end in marriages; love-making is difficult when one vividly remembers the divinity in a dirty pinafore.'

‘Perhaps that’s true,’ said her hostess. ‘I used to think you would marry Charles, my dear.’

‘I’m three years older than he,’ said Elizabeth. ‘Mother was two years older than father, but three is even worse.’ She spoke without offence, although with gravity, but Lady Saintsbury did not see her way to continuing that speculation, and filled up an awkward pause with a pathetic sigh.

‘And even if they did marry,’ went on Miss Shelford, ‘I think you would have no reason to object.’

But Lady Saintsbury shook her head. ‘I hope she’ll make a better marriage than that ; she’s come back now, I think, and I should like you to see her. Will you ring that bell for me, dear ? I’ll send for her.’

When Margaret came in her grandmother asked about her visit. The girl said that her friend’s baby was too lovely for words, and that the house was so nice and large. Miss Shelford asked where it was, and Lady Saintsbury looked deplorable when Margaret explained that it was in Elm Park Gardens.

‘You see, Elizabeth,’ said the elder woman, ‘the poor child has only seen this hovel and the Bamfields’. And I’m sure I don’t know how she will ever see any life like other girls.’

But Miss Shelford’s smile somehow comforted Lady Saintsbury. To her surprise she found that her guest and her granddaughter were talking together. Elizabeth soon discovered that Margaret’s interests were on a much higher level than

her grandmother's, and that her education had given her a good foundation. She pitied the child even while she admired her; she thought that her good breeding and charming looks, together with her keen mind, were out of place in that hothouse atmosphere.

When Elizabeth rose to go, Lady Saintsbury told Margaret to take her downstairs. Miss Shelford kissed her hostess and promised to come and see her at the end of January when she should be back in London. But she lingered a little in the tiny hall with Margaret, with whom she wanted a word alone.

'My dear,' she said, 'it must be a great blow to you that your parents have put off their return. I shall hope to see something of you; when we were your age, your mother and I were great friends. Give her my love when you write.'

Margaret flushed with pleasure. 'Mother sent her love to you in the dreadful letter I got yesterday; she said if I saw you I was to be sure to give it.'

Miss Shelford hesitated a moment. 'Your mother married very young, and since then I have seen hardly anything of her, but she is not a person one forgets. Do you know, you remind me a good deal of her.'

Margaret's delight showed plainly without words.

'I must go now, Margaret; every good wish for Christmas and New Year.'

Lady Saintsbury was wrapped in gloom when

her granddaughter joined her. To begin with, no more visitors could come that day, and then, after the effort she had made to control her annoyance before Elizabeth, she naturally felt a reaction. While Margaret changed for dinner, Lady Saintsbury considered the coming meal with the utmost depression. She had felt it best on the whole to have Margaret with her ; it fitted in better than usual. The last pheasant of a couple of brace, sent by an old neighbour, was to be the *pièce de résistance*. If Lady Saintsbury had been alone, a hot water plate would have come direct from the kitchen with just the cut she liked, daintily arranged with her chips and bread sauce. As it was, she would have to endure the smell of the whole dinner in her room, and probably get it cold. She supposed Margaret must learn to carve, as she couldn't, and ' practise on me,' added Lady Saintsbury, ' for there isn't room to put a side-board on which Susan could carve. Anyhow I hope she won't be late ; we can't begin like that.'

Margaret was in excellent time, and fortunately was able to entertain her grandmother with an account of her visit to Irene Durant. But after the dinner had been taken away—and Lady Saintsbury was as much aware as Susan of the extra trouble—Margaret asked to write some letters, and this involved lights in her grandmother's eyes. The tiny house was charmingly fitted up, and the electric light prettily disposed, but Lady Saintsbury only liked certain switches turned on,

and others were taboo. So again depression settled like a cloud upon her.

‘Of course, she meant well by hacking off a leg of the bird for herself without being told that it was her portion,’ the hostess mused to herself; ‘but what a mess she made! And cutting both sides of the breast to get me my small meal; I am sure the irritation must be bad for my indigestion.’

At this moment the telephone bell rang sharply. Lady Saintsbury took up the receiver and was soon in animated conversation. Margaret, of course, could only hear her grandmother, and was much puzzled by the scraps of talk that came to her.

‘I’m sure I don’t know what she has to wear; I was leaving everything to her mother to get.’ ‘You are more than kind, and if you are really going to be chiefly alone, I daresay she would do for the country.’ . . . ‘Yes, well, that’s the greatest comfort to me; tell nurse I hope Margaret won’t give her any trouble, though I am afraid her clothes will want attention.’ . . . ‘Do say to your father how grateful I am; is he there?’ . . . ‘Ask him to speak to me for a moment.’ . . . ‘Is that you, Lord Shelford? How very good of you and Elizabeth! I do hope the child won’t be in your way.’ . . . ‘Thank you, pretty well, Dr. Brown says; but I find that anniversaries are sad times as one gets on in years, and I shall be glad when Christmas is over.’ . . . ‘Yes, we neither of us forget old days, I know. Good-night, dear Lord Shelford, and a thousand thanks. I won’t

trouble Elizabeth again to-night ; my dear love to her.'

It was a radiant face that her grandmother turned to Margaret as she put down the friendly instrument.

'There, child, that's the very best thing that could happen to you. Those dear Shelfords have asked you to go to Mallow for New Year and to stay a whole fortnight. What a lovely time you'll have !'

Margaret was pleased at the news, but not so much delighted as Lady Saintsbury appeared to be.

'It's most awfully kind,' she began, when she was cut short.

'Kind ! I should think it is ! It's quite wonderful good luck, and just what I hardly dared to hope for. Write and tell your mother at once ; no, give me my writing block and I will. Oh, I am so thankful !' and Lady Saintsbury, quite oblivious that she was showing relief as well as pleasure to poor Margaret, scribbled a triumphant note to Mrs. Hurst, and then settled down to an evening divided between reminiscence and speculation. As usual in such cases, what Margaret thought she had learnt second-hand about her future friends had mostly to be unlearnt when she was actually there. But if it was the first time that she was instructed about Lord Shelford, it was also the last. For she was destined to know about the great man what he chose that she should learn, and to be the master's own pupil.

CHAPTER IV

MARGARET'S NEW FRIENDS

MALLOW COURT, Lord Shelford's home in Buckinghamshire, really possessed many of the advantages which agents so often assert—with equal confidence and untruth—are attached to the mansions on their list. It was a handsome roomy house of the Georgian period, built chiefly in red brick, but it was finished with stone facings and had a balustrade running round the roof, and it also possessed a really noble portico and pediment in the same material. It stood in a small park within easy distance of two good packs of hounds, and had admirable shooting near by; it had beautiful grounds which did not necessitate a fabulous number of gardeners; Lord Shelford with his usual good judgment had kept the character of the ancient gardens round the house. He eschewed rock gardening, and his glass-houses were relegated to an obscure situation. But the paramount advantage of Mallow in its owner's eyes was that it lay within easy reach of London; when Lord Shelford, twenty years before, had decided to buy

a country place, Mallow's access to town had been the determining factor in its favour.

At that time Thomas Shelford was already a rich man, although the biggest addition to his fortune was made by a coup much later, not long indeed before he gave up all connection with the City, which he did prior to taking a minor post in the Government. He lived very strenuous years when he was both a business man and a member of Parliament; gradually the House took more of his time and the City less. But quite early in his political career he determined to have a country house, where he could entertain such of his friends as he wished, and such of his party as he deemed expedient.

Snow fell heavily as Margaret travelled down to Mallow on the afternoon of the day before New Year's Eve. She was in that peculiar state, midway between nervousness and elation, which belongs especially to inexperience. When we have seen more of life, our excitement takes different forms. Some of us to the end of our days are happy in constantly having new experiences, but our first plunge into the unknown is never exactly repeated.

It was dark when Margaret got into the Shelfords' car and waited while the servant went back to find her luggage. She felt suddenly afraid; the chill around her seemed to be within her too, and a blank wonder at her own presence in this country station-yard filled her mind with depression. If only she could go back! But now the car was

moving, and the drive which at first she thought interminable next seemed very short to the girl, for she saw the lights of the house all too soon. The great front door was opened, and the splendid glow from within shed a ruddy hue on the snow-covered ground ; Margaret found herself in a hall which seemed bewilderingly large, with two great fires and an expanse of floor between them on which lay noble skins and rugs. She hesitated, and then observed that the butler was looking meaningly at her. She moved forward, and wondered dully how long it would take to get to the end of the hall. At that moment a door opened, and Miss Shelford came towards her.

‘ How cold you must be, dear ! ’ she said ; ‘ come into the warmth.’

She turned to order fresh tea, and as she brought her eyes back to Margaret she was struck with the girl's appearance. She looked indeed her very best ; the cold air and her own tension had strengthened her colour and brightened her eyes ; her brilliant health was shown in her every movement as she followed her hostess.

As Margaret passed through the door she raised her head, and her eyes fell on the handsomest man she had ever seen. She had indeed met few men in her short life, but many women of more experience were ready to endorse her opinion of her host's appearance. Thomas Shelford was now sixty-three, but he had never been in better looks. His tall figure, broad-shouldered yet spare, was still as easily

upright as ever ; he was neither stiffly erect as men who struggle against their years, nor bent as men who yield to them. His regular features were sufficiently marked without being rugged ; his dark eyes were so piercing that one forgave the eyebrows for being too heavy, since they served somewhat to shade his gaze. His mouth was well-formed and no moustache hid it ; the whole of the lower part of the face was at once hard and sensitive, and the clean-shaven jaw was very powerful. His black hair was flecked with grey ; in earlier years its hard tone must have contrasted too vividly with the clear brown skin. The attraction of perfect health was his to a high degree ; and throughout the whole man there was a sense of joyous vigour and conscious power that he owed to a truly magnificent vitality. It is said that Englishmen take their pleasures sadly ; Lord Shelford took the whole world as he found it, and, behold, it was very good. He had his detractors ; what successful man is without them ? Plenty of men could be heard to whisper that Lord Shelford travelled too light in the matter of scruples ; but his triumphant serenity listened to no murmurers. As his splendid health could bear any strain, so his contentment was proof against the rubs of life. If his perceptions wanted something of refinement and delicacy, his charm covered up the lack. It is doubtless well that there are few men so dangerously attractive, so easily successful as Lord Shelford, but when we do meet such an one, his

pagan joyousness often serves to brighten our own cheerless way, and to afford us almost as much pleasure as it gives to him.

'Father, this is Margaret Hurst,' said Elizabeth, and the girl found herself being welcomed by the master of the house.

'I am glad to make the acquaintance of the third generation; your grandmother and I are old friends.' He looked at his daughter. 'Is the fresh tea here?'

'It will be directly,' said Elizabeth quietly, as she turned towards a singularly handsome woman with an exquisite complexion and masses of golden hair. 'Mrs. Brough, let me introduce Miss Hurst; Mr. Brough, Mr. Waters. We are a very small party, Margaret, I hope you will not be dull.'

The girl protested shyly, but she felt that tea was a welcome relief. Mr. Waters looked after her kindly, and sat down beside her. Mr. Brough moved to his hostess, and Margaret gathered that they were taking up a discussion which had begun before her arrival. Lord Shelford talked to Mrs. Brough; Margaret was aware that his voice was a very good one, full yet clear, low yet powerful. In a few minutes he rose and went out, the girl thought that his eyes rested on her for a moment as he passed. The room was both large and long; at one end a full-sized billiard-table was placed across its width, at the other quite a number of people could gather for tea or games.

Mrs. Brough seemed restless after Lord

Shelford's departure ; she took up a book and put it down again ; she moved her chair and then returned it to its former place ; she discouraged an attempt on Waters' part to draw her into the mild conversation that he was keeping up with Margaret ; but, finally, she pounced, as it were, on her husband to his evident surprise. ' Arthur, how often have I told you never to wear ties of that colour ? It makes you look positively ghastly ! '

' I thought this one went with a pale complexion,' said Mr. Brough rather sulkily.

' Pale ! ' repeated Mrs. Brough scornfully. ' That's the worst abused word there is. People who are sallow or chalky think themselves pale ; grey or olive or any neutral tint is called pallor. Your colour is yellow, perhaps you call it ivory.'

Her hearers laughed nervously, except Mr. Brough, who looked as like a thunder-cloud as his complexion permitted. Miss Shelford hastened to the rescue. ' Don't be hard on us, dear Mrs. Brough ; none of us have your lovely colouring ; look at my brown skin, I get it from my father.'

' Lord Shelford's tint is a clear tan,' said Mrs. Brough loftily ; ' on the other hand, Arthur's is a muddy yellow ; of course, he can't help it, but it is muddy.'

Mr. Brough glared at his wife, but before he could speak Mr. Waters cut in deftly.

' Well, we've all been told that beauty is only skin deep, you know. And as for poor Brough's tie, I think the other ladies would say it was better

than mine at any rate. If you are so severe, you will drive us all to take refuge in make-up.

“ Little grains of powder, little dabs of paint,
Make the skin look nice and smooth, even if it ain't.” ’

Mrs. Brough smiled graciously, but her husband did not unbend.

‘ I must say, Alice,’ he began, in the tone usually reserved for a public meeting, ‘ that I consider your remarks quite uncalled for. In fact,’ he said, rapidly thawing in his own warmth, ‘ I don’t like them at all.’

‘ Oh yes, you do, dear,’ said his lady sweetly, ‘ you like everything I say. Now we’ll go upstairs and help each other with our letters.’ She sailed majestically away with her little husband, still breathing stertorously, fuming in her wake.

The three who remained sighed with relief. Charles Waters turned to Margaret whose alarm had not quite gone. ‘ You must not mind their little ways, Miss Hurst ; they are a most devoted couple. It might be pleasanter for the rest of us if their squabbles were not in public, but I believe that their private bliss is so great that they need a change sometimes. So we all have to bear these scenes ; they enjoy them so much that they forget that the rest of us are shut out from the fun.’

Miss Shelford smiled and said : ‘ He’s quite right, Margaret. Their love-story is a most romantic one. You can see how beautiful she is ; she was

even more lovely as a young girl ten years ago. Her father is a rich man, very well born, and Alice was expected to make a great marriage. Suddenly when she was at Oxford for Commem., in her second season, she fell in love with Arthur Brough ; he was quite young too and only a promising historian. But she saw how brilliant he was, and brought every one over to her side ; and she was right, for he's already very distinguished in his line, isn't he, Charles ? '

' Yes, he's looked to for great things in the future. Isn't she related to Lady Alston ? '

' Yes, and we must take her over to see them ; they are staying not far from here. Would you care to go, Margaret ? Lady Alston is a charming woman, and the Prime Minister is a most amusing old man.'

Margaret wondered vaguely whether she was the same girl whom she had hitherto thought she knew. Was she actually being asked if she cared to meet the Prime Minister ?

As she went up to dress, fear overtook her again. She begged Miss Shelford to come into her room and look at her frocks ; she bravely exposed the nakedness of the land. While they were together Elizabeth's old nurse came in ; she showed how she could easily change the things that most needed alteration, and by a few dexterous touches to Margaret's most adequate frock she sent her down to dinner quite suitably attired. The girl indeed was at that happy age when dress is of supremely little value. Mr.

Waters put her on Lord Shelford's left, and crossed over to sit between Mrs. Brough and Elizabeth ; she wondered whether the lady and gentleman would exhibit any signs of their late encounter. She need not have troubled ; calm was upon Mrs. Brough as peace upon the waters. She looked more lovely than ever ; her dress was designed by a Frenchman to enhance her beauty, and it amply fulfilled its mission. She had the wisdom to like her friends to say ' How well Mrs. Brough is looking,' rather than ' What a beautiful dress she is wearing.' Lord Shelford and she seemed to be enjoying themselves greatly ; Mr. Brough was talking to Miss Shelford, and it happened that Margaret sat silent for some moments looking at the fine room and observing the beautiful appointments which she had never seen before. Presently she started palpably ; the host was looking at her, and somehow she felt as if he had been watching her without her knowledge, though as a matter of fact he had only just turned to her.

' How did you leave Lady Saintsbury ? ' he asked, and when Margaret had answered he said : ' She has had hard measure from life ; that accident was a crushing blow. Present my homage when you write ; I must go and see her some day.'

' I know she would like that very much ; she sent so many thanks for your kindness in having me here.'

Lord Shelford laughed. ' I'm afraid you'll find us a very old party, but age has its advantages.

For instance, it makes me feel entitled to call you Margaret ; your mother has always been Mary to me ; she's the same age as my daughter, you see.'

Margaret blushed vividly ; Lord Shelford approved the quality of her skin as the bright red mounted in her cheeks.

' Oh please do,' she said, ' it's very kind of you.'

Then, conscious that she had said something rather silly, she blushed yet deeper, and, quite unaware that her confusion was a pretty sight to her host, she felt thoroughly uncomfortable.

Lord Shelford came to her rescue with some quiet talk about her parents. Presently he said to Mr. Brough : ' Colonel Hurst got his D.S.O. under peculiarly interesting circumstances ; try and persuade his daughter to tell you them,' and so he turned back to the fair Alice who was obviously beginning to tire of Mr. Waters.

It was the sad fate of that person that he always failed to be as interesting as he seemed. Charles Waters was really rather charming, but he always stopped short of any definite fulfilment of the promise that his attractions offered. Unkind people said that he was overborne by Lord Shelford, and that if he had not been naturally weak, the other's training would have made him so. He had been Lord Shelford's ward, and had never known his parents ; his holidays from Winchester and Oxford were spent under his guardian's roof, and even now Lord Shelford kept a room for him both in the country and in Bryanston Square. He

had done fairly well at college, more because his tastes were scholarly than because he had worked very hard. He had brains and education, but considering the chances he had had from the first, he ought to have done better at the Bar. He was kindly with the easy pleasantness of good-nature, but he was not the companion that a man would choose for that last ditch so often spoken of. His best point was his unswerving, dog-like devotion to Lord Shelford; his gratitude was as strong as any feeling of which he was capable. He had a brotherly affection for Elizabeth, but was inclined to take for granted her constant interest and practical kindness. He was good-looking, tall, and, by comparison with the Shelfords, almost fair; the weakness of his mouth was disguised by a rather heavy moustache. He was reputed an unusually good dancer, and he rode well; but strenuous exercise of body was no more to his liking than severe application of the mind. In one of his few bitter moments, Lord Shelford had summed him up as 'a slight, unmeritable man, meet to be sent on errands,' but the words had never passed his lips, and to the world at large Charles Waters was an excellent fellow.

When Margaret woke next morning in the biggest bedroom she had ever slept in, it was not surprising that she confused for the moment her dreams of the night and her recollections of the evening. But the feeling passed off, and she found to her astonishment that she quickly got

used to her new situation. She knew that she was only an entirely unimportant school-girl, and yet she found that in an incredibly short space of time she was positively enjoying the company of distinguished people.

The expedition to the house where the Alstons were visiting was a great success ; Margaret was passionately fond of horses, and the Prime Minister himself walked with her to inspect their host's stables. Afterwards he found himself alone with his colleague to whom he had a private word to say. The two men walked up and down before the house in the brisk air and bright sunshine. Sir Gilbert listened attentively to Lord Shelford, and at the end said : ' Write that to Middlesex ; his opinion will carry more weight in the Cabinet than any one's. Curious how a Vincent has always been in politics, and yet the best of them all seems sometimes almost half-hearted about the game.'

Lord Shelford paused before he answered. ' I wouldn't put it quite like that ' was all his reply.

Sir Gilbert did not pursue the subject, but turned it to Mrs. Brough's visit.

' Are Alice and Arthur as expert bickerers as ever ? ' he asked.

His companion assented with a laugh, and Alston went on : ' That's a nice child Miss Shelford has brought ; who is she ? '

' A granddaughter of Lady Saintsbury ; you remember the name ? '

‘ Yes, and they are a good-looking race ; the girl is uncommonly pretty.’

‘ Yes, she has the kind of looks that last,’ said Shelford, ‘ and she will be all the better in a few years’ time when she’s filled out a bit ; she’s too thin at present.’

He caught a momentary look of surprise in the Prime Minister’s eyes, and he realised that he had been speaking too frankly as a connoisseur. He hastened to add : ‘ The poor child has a phenomenally dull time—parents in India, invalid grandmother—quite the pathos of fiction. So my Elizabeth asked her for a change.’

‘ She’s got wits too,’ pursued Sir Gilbert, who did not seem inclined to leave the subject. ‘ She took some things I said about Shakespeare and the musical glasses quite intelligently. And she betrayed unusual classical knowledge for a girl, when we looked at those horses all named as much as possible from mythology.’

Both men laughed, and that evening Lord Shelford questioned Margaret as to her Latin. He even fetched a Virgil and made her translate a bit to him ; praised her and said she should learn Greek. Margaret did herself justice ; she was interested enough to lose self-consciousness ; afterwards she was rather appalled at her own temerity.

‘ I suppose Lord Shelford is a very good classic, isn’t he ? ’ she asked Mr. Brough.

‘ You may safely say that, and your praise be still within the mark ’ was the answer. ‘ He

comes of a race of scholars ; some say Oxford lost a son likely to bring her lasting fame when Shelford went into the City. He married very young and had to give up his fellowship ; but he really cared about scholarship for its own sake, and he has kept in touch with Oxford although he left it so early ; you see, he went into business in London and did exceptionally well, and then went into politics and did even better.'

' And his wife died while she was still young, didn't she ? ' asked Margaret.

' Yes, before he was forty, soon after he was in Parliament, I think.'

' And he never married again,' mused the girl.

' No, he never married again,' echoed the man.

That night Margaret's last thoughts were of Mrs. Shelford, whose joy she felt had been cut short so early and so cruelly.

CHAPTER V

LORD SHELFORD MAKES A SUGGESTION

WHEN Margaret returned to Eaton Terrace, she found the house exceedingly small. But she had prepared herself for that, and was not taken by surprise. What struck her for the first time was the beauty of its contents, the daintiness of its arrangements. She did not realise that the training of her eye in such matters had begun at Mallow ; but in a vague way, which she could hardly have explained, she felt that the quality of her surroundings was somehow akin to the quality of those she had left, although the scale was so entirely different. The feeling gave her pleasure, and served to draw her and Lady Saintsbury together. For Margaret told her grandmother that the tiny sitting-room reminded her of the great drawing-room at Mallow, and the old lady was gratified. The girl had been taught at school to write accounts of places visited or scenes witnessed ; her descriptions were good and entertained Lady Saintsbury. She talked well of things and people ; such talk was more pleasing to her hostess than the discussion

of books, in which she had hitherto found her granddaughter too prone to indulge. Margaret amused her hearer by her obvious hero-worship of Lord Shelford ; his name was constantly on her lips, and she dwelt on his kindness, brilliancy, and good looks with innocent frankness. But it struck her hearer as strange that Lord Shelford should have devoted so much time to the girl as from Margaret's account he evidently had done at Mallow. Lady Saintsbury was watchful as well as amused ; it was not like the great man to bore himself ; then what did he see in the child ?

The Shelfords were due in town for the session at the end of the month, and, as the time approached, Margaret found herself wondering how soon she should see them. Her grandmother had wisely explained to her that they would be far busier in London than at Mallow, and that she could not expect that they would be able to spare very much time for her. Nevertheless, Margaret's mind dwelt persistently and constantly on their next meeting, and she even perceived herself that she was growing restless, and began to think of concealing her feelings from Lady Saintsbury. The day fixed for their arrival came, it passed, it was succeeded by others, and no sign came from Bryanston Square. Margaret tried to think that they had changed the date of their arrival, but the opening of Parliament took place and she knew that they were in London. Then she suddenly found that she had no need to control her excitement ; she

felt, on the contrary, listless and uninterested in all around her. Roger Bamfield called on the day when this change in the girl became apparent, and he was puzzled by it. He had been to see her several times since her return from Mallow, and he had thoroughly enjoyed her vivid descriptions of persons and places. But to-day Margaret seemed strangely uninterested in the Shelfords and in everything else. She was polite and subdued ; Roger hoped that his little friend was not going to lose all her freshness, and he took refuge in the supposition that she had a headache. As he left, he ventured to say that he thought that she did not look very well, but he was met by a civil assurance of good health that he felt distinctly baffling. Lady Saintsbury was much pleased at Margaret's manners, and began to congratulate herself on the girl's quickness in picking up the shades of becoming behaviour.

It was about six o'clock ; poor Roger, who had made a special effort to get off early and have a good talk with Margaret, had only just taken his departure, feeling it useless to prolong his visit, when the door-bell pealed.

' Now, who can it be, I wonder ? ' said Lady Saintsbury ; ' probably a tradesman ringing the wrong bell.'

But steps were heard, Susan opened the door, and Lord Shelford, looking by contrast with the little room taller and more striking than usual, walked up to Lady Saintsbury's couch.

‘ But how delightful ! ’ exclaimed the old lady, and her protestations of pleasure made Margaret hope that her own tongue-tied confusion would escape notice, more especially as Lord Shelford only gave her a glance as he shook hands and devoted himself to her grandmother. But his glance had shown him all that he expected to see ; Margaret’s blushing awkwardness was exactly what he hoped to find.

‘ I thought, as the House wasn’t sitting, I would come round for a talk,’ he said. ‘ One of the advantages of the modern lateness of dinner is, that it gives one a chance to find people alone after other callers have left.’ He paused, and let his piercing eyes rest on Lady Saintsbury in a way which she felt denoted a personal interest. Lord Shelford’s effects were calculated with such ease that they seemed more natural than the genuine emotions of others.

‘ You look wonderfully little changed, yet you and I have known each other for forty years, and we were neither of us children when the acquaintance began.’

‘ I don’t know about that ; you were only twenty-three when you married, I am four years older. You still look astonishingly young,’ said Lady Saintsbury eagerly ; ‘ if you had vegetated one could understand it, but how you can work as you do and show never a trace of it is incomprehensible.’

‘ A man’s as old as he feels,’ quoted Lord

Shelford, 'and I feel quite disgracefully young. In fact, it isn't well for Margaret to see such an elderly person off his guard, and as I want a good talk with you of old times, we had better be alone.'

This was said so quietly, and he opened the door so naturally, that Margaret was outside the room before either she or her grandmother realised what had happened.

Lord Shelford drew his chair a trifle nearer to his old friend, and looked at her rather sadly. 'How little any of us can foretell of the future, and how merciful the limitation is! Do you remember my wedding-day, forty years ago? You ought to, as you were a bridesmaid! We should all of us have gone more softly if we had known what was in store for us.' He stopped with a sigh, and Lady Saintsbury said gently :

'I still have the brooch with your initials and hers on it.'

'What a wonderful day it was; nothing that we saw on our honeymoon was more lovely than the Oxfordshire views that evening. You know, Emma and I only pretended to go to London when we left her home; we really slept that night at Oxford; it was quite empty and no one recognised us. She had a fancy for us to begin married life in the city that to her great regret could not be our home, just as she chose to be married at Dorchester, although the parish church was, of course, nearer.'

'Well, it's one of the most beautiful churches

there is, and her father's place was close enough to warrant it. And what a pretty wedding it was! I always thought the old man had wonderfully good taste, in spite of having made so much money in beer.' They both laughed, and Lady Saintsbury hastened to add: 'Of course, Emma was more like her mother than her father; she was a wonderful mixture of gentleness and courage.'

'How things are changed! Emma gone so many years ago, your life wrecked in its prime, I a lonely man with no son to follow me. I suppose I have had better luck than most, but I fancy that even I should shrink from having my time over again.'

'My dear old friend,' said Lady Saintsbury warmly, 'no one has so devoted a daughter. I always think that you and Elizabeth are ideal companions.'

'She may leave me at any time; I am a lonely man, however you look at it. If she marries, who will nurse me when I'm decrepit?' He looked so astonishingly vigorous as he uttered these words that his hearer burst out laughing, and Shelford himself joined in.

'Well, I hope Margaret will make a difference for the better in your life,' he said; 'we found her a very charming visitor.'

'You were extraordinarily kind to her; she has talked of nothing but her visit since she came back. I am so thankful to you for letting her see a glimpse of the world, poor child.' Lady

Saintsbury spoke earnestly, and Lord Shelford saw that the proposal he had come to make would meet with only a show of resistance.

‘What sort of a school was she at? She’s been quite well grounded in Latin.’

‘Well, rather an exceptional kind of place; it is kept by her mother’s old governess and a German friend, and they really look well after the girls.’

‘Is Margaret delicate? She doesn’t look it,’ said Lord Shelford, with some eagerness.

‘Oh no, she’s as strong as possible, and so healthy that the inevitable childish maladies never pulled her down at all. And she doesn’t know what it is to feel tired, lucky child. What I mean is that the girls got plenty of boating and riding, and were not allowed to strain themselves with hockey matches and modern abominations of that kind.’

‘Oh she rides, does she? Is she fond of it?’

‘My dear Lord Shelford, she is fonder of it than of anything in the world. Of course, I’ve never seen her on a horse, but I believe she looks quite remarkably well in the saddle.’

‘She tells me the Hursts won’t be back for two years. Isn’t it rather a difficult matter for you having her here all that time?’

‘I really don’t know how I shall manage it,’ said Lady Saintsbury. ‘She’s a dear good girl, but it is dreadfully inconvenient for me, and I’m sure it’s most unsuitable for her. How is she ever to see people or to go about?’

Lord Shelford nodded sympathetically. 'No, it does seem a trying situation. Does she care about reading? She seems well educated for a girl.'

'She reads too much,' said Lady Saintsbury with asperity; 'that's the worst of it; and that's one reason why I don't want her to go back to school, as her mother suggests, for special masters and study. You see she was head of the school for her last year; we must be careful, or we shall have her going to a woman's college, and then she'll never marry, or she'll be caught hold of by one of Mary's High Church divines, and attach herself to a religious order.'

Lord Shelford laughed. 'Is she a very pious young person?' he inquired.

'Well, that Miss Williams was always churchy. I think her influence over Mary wasn't particularly wise, and though Margaret's taken no harm yet, I don't want it overdone. But I'm old-fashioned and past things now,' and Lady Saintsbury gave the usual pathetic sigh.

'Don't say that, you are as clear-sighted as ever,' answered her visitor in a manner at once gentle and decisive, which his hostess found very soothing. 'But it must be an additional burden to have this responsibility. Is Margaret sweet-tempered?'

'Oh yes, and very unselfish; and that's just it. Of course, I'm devoted to the child, but how can I do the best for her, tied here as I am? And

I am so much afraid that Roger Bamfield will snap her up, just as Jack Hurst got hold of her mother.' With a little encouragement she plunged into the story of her anxieties ; her companion listened attentively and nodded once or twice. At last she stopped and sighed heavily.

But Lord Shelford paused long enough to attract Lady Saintsbury's attention. She looked at him, and he seemed almost to be speaking to himself.

'And there's my Elizabeth with no companion and so many lonely hours,' he mused ; 'I often think she wants some one to rouse herself for.' Then, as if suddenly struck by an idea, he exclaimed : 'Why should not the child pay us long visits ? It would do Elizabeth worlds of good to have the interest of taking out a young thing like that. To tell you the truth, I'm beginning to be a little afraid of Elizabeth's becoming virtually what she threatens to be in reality, namely, an old maid. I dare say I'm selfish, but heaven knows I've never stood in the way of her marrying. Some one bright about her would do her worlds of good.'

Lady Saintsbury doubted if she had heard aright. 'You don't mean you think of having Margaret in London ?' she asked, and as Lord Shelford merely nodded, she went on : 'Oh it would be the making of the child ! I really can't say how thankful I should be, but I must not let you two take my burdens.'

Lord Shelford bent forward with a frankly affectionate air. 'My friend, I don't offer to

repay a debt, but I do ask to receive a pleasure.' His voice was very clear, although it had dropped to a low tone; Lady Saintsbury thought he had never looked so handsome, even in his youthful days. 'Are you too proud to take the help which I so thankfully accepted? Think for how many years you were the only woman I could turn to, when my poor motherless girl needed a better judgment than mine. No one knows how sincerely I tried to make up to Elizabeth, but I was working desperately hard in order to fill my own lonely life, and the task was beyond me. Without you, she would have suffered still more than she did. She is indeed a wonderful daughter to me now, but I fancy sometimes that I strain her too much. For instance, the daily riding must tire her; if Margaret rides, she could take her place; Elizabeth's horse is very gentle, and I would look after her.'

How much his hearer accepted at its face value it would be difficult to say. Lady Saintsbury's surprise at the amount of time Lord Shelford had been able to bestow on Margaret recurred to her, and she ventured an attempt to sound him.

'Do you think the child is attractive? I see no one now, and, of course, she is not to be compared to what her mother was; but is she up to the average?'

But she was dealing with a man for whom she was no match.

'My dear lady, how should I know? You

and I cannot pretend to a paramount interest in young girls. I am told they are now called flappers. I hope they're better than their name.' He laughed easily, and then became grave again. 'You must not put me off; will you let us help you with Margaret, and also will you realise that you are helping me? I know you'll not repeat it, but I think this plan might save Elizabeth from herself a bit.'

There was a grim knowledge in both their hearts that Elizabeth's life—so contentedly accepted, as it were, at second-hand—was in the greatest possible contrast to their own selfishness; but each preserved the appearance of reluctance to take any advantage of an old and valued friendship.

Lord Shelford rose. 'Silence gives consent, and you will let Bryanston Square have a chance to help Eaton Terrace with Margaret. Elizabeth shall write.'

Lady Saintsbury gave him her hand; Lord Shelford bent over it.

'Good-bye, my friend,' he said; 'let us remember we have not too much time left in which to be of use to each other for "auld lang syne."' '

He was gone. He had meant to see Margaret again, but now he would not risk rousing her grandmother's suspicions, which he had seen clearly were ready to awake.

When the girl joined Lady Saintsbury, she found her disinclined to talk. Margaret had been

a little hurt by her exclusion, and she thought Lord Shelford would have left a message for her. But Lady Saintsbury had decided to wait for the letter before telling Margaret of the invitation, and she said in answer to the inquiry: 'No, he didn't leave a message. We talked a good deal of his wife; I was her bridesmaid, you know.'

'She must have been so happy!' exclaimed Margaret.

'She was very delicate,' was the evasive reply; and then: 'You had better go upstairs and get ready for dinner.'

Lady Saintsbury lay so still that she might have been a sculptured dame adorning her own tombstone. For the moment, at any rate, Lord Shelford had lulled her newly awakened watchfulness to sleep, he had filled her mind with something else. It was not of him and Margaret that she was thinking now, but of him and his feeling for her. Evidently she had under-rated his faithful friendship, his sympathetic interest. It was to help her that he was content to saddle himself with a half-fledged girl, and she had thought him struck with the child! As if the keen brain, the brilliant intellect of a man at the height of success could find interest in a school-girl! Lady Saintsbury felt vaguely that she had a powerful friend only waiting to help her; she was more cheered than she had been for many a long day. One of Lord Shelford's greatest assets was the knowledge of when to stay his hand; he did not

overdo things ; he made the impression he desired and left it to do its own work.

When Roger Bamfield next called, he found Margaret so utterly changed that she did not seem like the same girl. The invitation to Bryanston Square had come, had been accepted, was almost immediately to be enjoyed. Roger tried to shake his mind free of an ever-recurring suspicion ; his excellent common sense told him there was no cause for alarm in Margaret's going to visit old family friends, and in her delight at the prospect ; but yet a sensation of anxiety, vague yet strong, laid hold upon him. And that sensation was to last for the best part of two years ; to begin by making his days uneasy and to end by filling his life with torture. For Roger Bamfield was one of those rather inarticulate persons who are more prone to suffering than to enjoyment ; one of those in whom devotion does not weaken because it is not returned ; a man, in short, who is handicapped for most races, but nevertheless has his compensations, even if the world fails to recognise them.

CHAPTER VI

ELIZABETH FORCES AN EXPLANATION

‘ DID you find Lady Saintsbury able to see you, father ? ’ asked Elizabeth, when she came back late from an anti-Suffrage meeting.

‘ Yes, I had a long talk with her, going back to the days before you were born, Elizabeth. I always like seeing her ; she’s such a queer mixture of the “ wholly-worldly and the worldly-holy,” as Laurence Oliphant said.’

‘ You don’t very often give yourself the pleasure of visiting her,’ said his daughter significantly. She had come to find him in what they called the library, the big room behind the drawing-room, which on that floor took up the greater part of the extent of the house and was in reality two rooms thrown into one, and approached either by the drawing-room or by a separate private staircase. One end held a full-sized billiard table, and the other end was used as Lord Shelford’s sitting-room ; his big writing-table and a good many bookcases stood there, and it was very comfortable. On the ground floor was the study where the secretary

worked in the morning, and where Waters was often to be found. Between it and the dining-room was the little morning room in which Elizabeth wrote her letters and did her business.

Lord Shelford felt from his daughter's tone that she had come for an account of his visit to Eaton Terrace. He determined to make a virtue of necessity and get it over at once. They got on admirably, these two, but they were too much alike not to clash when they came to grips. Elizabeth was handicapped by loving her father more than he loved her ; she seldom opposed him, and her life was chiefly a part of his at second-hand. She had both brains and education, and she certainly possessed some of her father's strong character and clear outlook, or she could not have got as much enjoyment out of her life as she managed to obtain. She had the excellent common-sense that does not ask to have things both ways. If her devotion to her father cost her a heavy price, her admiration of him brought her constant pleasure. Unlike many women, she enjoyed things as they were, without wanting them improved beyond recognition. If her love was critical, it was none the less loyal, yet at times her father almost dreaded her silent observation ; once or twice he had had experience of what she could do when she concentrated her will on a given course.

' Sit down, my dear,' he said, pointing to the easy-chair opposite to his own and on the other side of the fireplace. ' I want some talk with you,

and there's plenty of time yet before dinner. Are we going out to-night ? '

' Yes, we are dining with the Alstons at half-past eight ; but by all means let us talk.'

She looked intently at her father, handsome and debonair, and yet for once a little nervous. As she continued silent, Lord Shelford was obliged to begin.

' I found the dear old lady much worried about Margaret. She gave me to understand that young Bamfield rather pesters the girl with his attentions, and she seems to fear that he'll run off with her before she has seen anything of the world.'

' I should think he was a very suitable match,' remarked Elizabeth, ' sufficient difference in age and enough similarity in circumstances and connections.'

' It would be a very poor marriage,' replied her father, ' and I don't see where the suitability comes in.'

' Well, Roger Bamfield has a good position in the Treasury, which is certain to improve. He is an only son, and I remember hearing that Mrs. Durant's wedding portion was also her share of the father's money, and was paid, so that, as there are only those two children, Roger will have what there is.'

' Precious little,' interpolated Lord Shelford, ' and Mrs. Bamfield may live for years.'

' Then,' went on Elizabeth quietly, ' all that the Hursts have must come to Margaret, and though

it isn't much, and of course may not come to her for a long time, still it will be of use to her for children. Surely there's nothing to prevent their marrying if they are content to start on a modest scale.'

Lord Shelford shrugged his shoulders. 'The girl's too good for that, and Lady Saintsbury feels her responsibilities to Margaret's mother. In short, I have asked for the child to pay us a long visit here; it was a very good notion of yours to have her at Mallow, and I think she'd brighten us up here too.'

Miss Shelford again remained silent, and her father went on.

'She can save you the riding with me in the morning when you are tired, and, of course, she need never be in our way; she can go back and spend a day with her grandmother at any time. I'm sure it will be nice for you to have some young life about the place; you must often be lonely, and when I'm free I'm always a quarter of a century older than you.'

'Margaret is nearly as much younger; she is not yet nineteen, and can hardly be a companion to a woman approaching forty. And I can scarcely believe you have suggested this as a rest for me; it would involve my taking her to balls and add a great deal to my day's work.' She paused, and her father found himself wishing that there had been as much irony in her tone as in her words; she spoke with such common-sense

directness that there was nothing at which he could take offence. He tried again and from another side.

‘Elizabeth, Lady Saintsbury was your mother’s bridesmaid, and one of her earliest and dearest friends. I should like now that she is old and in altered circumstances to do what I can to pay some of the debt I owe to her. When you were left motherless that woman was my right hand ; I feel I owe her a very great deal.’

Her father’s references to her mother always stung Elizabeth, and he knew it. There was scorn and irony in her voice now.

‘And is it in memory of my mother that you want to take my horse for this girl ? Have you offered it, may I ask ? ’

If Elizabeth took that tone she could be brought to heel ; her father knew that when she forced him into the open he was by far the stronger. There was a brutal look in the tenacious mouth and rather heavy jaw as he said : ‘ I have certainly offered Miss Hurst the use of the horse you commonly ride. If, however, you choose to remember our relative positions, I will hire one for her, and leave the other for you.’

But Elizabeth was never easily cowed, and she had a stronger position now than when last they had had a struggle for the mastery. Lord Shelford recollected that it was some years since his daughter had torn down the decent curtain of pretence which he liked to keep between them. She had always

lost by that move, except on one occasion which he had never forgotten.

The daughter faced her father now, and spoke with dignity, through which her anger was apparent, but in which neither sarcasm nor bitterness entered.

‘Father, we must understand each other now, not only for our own sakes, but for this girl’s. Of course, you must and will do what you wish, but all the more it is necessary that you make things clear to me.’

Her father responded to her altered tone with simplicity and directness.

“I went to Craddock the other day ; he tells me that he has never seen a man of my years with so good a life. He says that a constitution like mine is almost unheard of in these days. I want to leave an heir, if I can find a woman to give me one—who will care for me disinterestedly. I think I can trust myself not to let her make a fool of me. I have seen too much of old men at the mercy of young wives.’

If Elizabeth had had any doubt of her father’s determination to be and to remain the predominant partner, his grim smile would have disillusioned her.

Lord Shelford continued : ‘Of course I know that it injures your prospects, but even so you will be a rich woman. Elizabeth, I am tired of having things second-hand ; if I can make this girl love me, I should like in time to marry her.’

‘And you want my help in training her for the

position, as well as my services in showing her your best side.'

Try as she would, she could not quite keep the taunt out of her voice.

'Is she strong, father? You know you don't like ill-health in those about you.'

'Never had a day's illness in her life except the usual juvenile complaints, Lady Saintsbury says, and she tells me they said at the school that she was the only girl who was never tired. Oh yes, she's both strong and healthy.'

'That is indeed fortunate,' said Elizabeth significantly, as she remembered that next to having no son her mother's worst shortcoming in her husband's eyes was her poor health. Lord Shelford was not at the moment in a position to take offence. He waited for Elizabeth's ultimatum, and at last it came.

'First you must assure me that you will deal honestly by this girl, neither teach her to love you and then throw her over, nor marry her and then break her heart.'

'I solemnly assure you that I will deal truly with her,' answered Lord Shelford.

'Habits are hard to break,' said his daughter grimly. 'My mother was not the only woman who died because you grew tired of her.'

'Elizabeth, you talk of what you cannot understand. Why do you try and hurt me by stirring up memories of a past which belongs to me alone?'

'Is the past ever done with?' asked Elizabeth.

‘Isn’t Charles alive, and won’t he suffer by this new love? His fair mother’s broken heart may be in the grave, but what of him?’

He winced, for he had loved the mother well. ‘For her sake I have done better by Charles than many men do by their lawful sons.’

‘Yes, but do you remember how you threw us together? He’s only three years younger than I, but did you take any care for me then? But for Nurse we might——’ She broke off. ‘Oh it’s too horrible; nothing has ever stood in the way of your pleasures except your ambition. When Nurse told me the tale I wondered that you risked having him so much with you. I asked you what you meant by it—do you remember your reply? “I may as well have the real good of the relationship; I should get the credit of it anyhow.” Could anything be more cynical, and it wasn’t even true. You needed some one you could make a tool of, some one thoroughly in your power, for that last transaction in the City which still makes you uneasy. Is it safe, buried deep enough to defy digging?’ Elizabeth’s voice rang out in scorn, and Lord Shelford did not attempt—at any rate just then—to get the upper hand. He faced her squarely and said: ‘Yes, I am safe for ever as regards the shares you allude to. But will you kindly tell me if you have another proviso to make? You led me to think that you had some other issues to touch on.’

‘I have only one more and this is it. You must make a will, not merely intend to do so;

one that safeguards me and Charles, and deals adequately by your possible wife and children. And you must tell me the provisions of it and let your solicitor keep it. Will you do this?'

'Certainly,' said her father, 'as you are the chief loser, it is the least I can do. Wait while I draft some suggestions now.'

He sat for a few moments thinking deeply, and then scribbled in pencil on a sheet of note-paper.

Then he looked up and addressed Elizabeth, who listened attentively.

'As my will now stands, Charles takes fifty thousand clear; he will then take half that clear, and twenty-five thousand if I have children will come back to them. You will also take twenty-five thousand clear, and the income of a hundred thousand to return to my heirs after your death. My widow would have five thousand a year, the upkeep of Mallow being allowed her, and a sum for the use of her children while minors. The rest to accumulate. There would not be much of the estate left after those charges, but, of course, they would fall in one by one and the future would be safe.'

Elizabeth noted her father's callous selfishness. He was arranging for an heir when he was within sight of the psalmist's limit of years, taking for granted and without regrets that her portion would never now be claimed by children of her own. And she whose heart had only once been stirred,

and then had suffered such horror and shock as turned her from all thoughts of love, was too proud to show how much her father wounded her.

‘Yes, that is very fair, but you ought to leave Margaret more than a life interest, which lasts only while she is your widow. Surely you would leave so young a woman free to marry again.’

The hard look came over Shelford’s face.

‘She won’t give my money to another fellow’s children,’ he said harshly.

‘For your own credit, father,’ insisted Elizabeth.

‘Well, ten thousand as her marriage settlement, the income for life and the principal to return to my children.’

‘If she and you have them,’ said Elizabeth; ‘otherwise let her do as she wishes with it. It is little enough. And now what am I to do with her beyond what I have sketched?’

‘Just that and nothing else. I shall not ask her for a year; she will have a chance then to learn the ropes.’

Elizabeth noticed how lightly her father passed from a state of tension to one of comfort. He sprang to his feet.

‘How long shall you take to dress, Elizabeth? The time is getting on.’

‘Not an hour, father; I’m going in a moment. But one word first. Many people would say I was lending myself to a bargain that was not creditable; please remember that I trust you to make it so.’

She looked wistfully at her idol, but he merely

nodded in return ; he did not wish to go over the ground again.

‘ And, father, forgive me for all that I have said to hurt you.’

She came nearer to him. ‘ Sometimes I feel very lonely. I will do what I can for you and for Margaret, and never let myself feel that I am working to lose my home. Only let me keep my place in your heart ; there is no one who both knows you so well and loves you so much as I do. Margaret will never be as proud of her handsome husband as I am of my father.’

There was a look of genuine emotion on Lord Shelford’s face as he took his daughter in his arms and kissed her.

CHAPTER VII

LADY VICTORIA FEELS HER WAY

MARGARET'S cup of happiness was running over when she arrived in Bryanston Square. She received a warm welcome both from the father and from the daughter, and was conducted to a charming room on the third floor, which before very long came to be regarded as her own. Elizabeth gave her into the charge of the old nurse; she herself had a fashionable maid, but Mrs. Drew, who had been her mother's maid and then her own nurse, was an inseparable part of the establishment. She was called the housekeeper; and although she performed only some of the duties of that functionary, she did other things that a modern servant does not understand. She was an invaluable nurse in illness, and perfectly ready at any time to fill any gap in the service of anyone else. She and Elizabeth—by Mrs. Drew's own desire—kept their distance, as the old woman said, before the other servants; but in private each showed the warm affection which she felt for the other.

Margaret was helped in her wardrobe by Nurse,

as she called her, and given a great many useful hints. The child was taken out by Elizabeth, but not very much ; it happened that the Court was in mourning, and that therefore Margaret was given a more gradual insight into things than would otherwise have been the case. Lord Shelford started some regular daily reading of Virgil with Margaret ; he was not the man to neglect any hold on a woman for whom he cared, and he was too wise to openly spoil the girl. He had a few quiet dinners and Margaret was shown some brilliant company in an intimate way ; plenty of people were ready to take an interest in the pretty girl, half shy, half eager. Lord Middlesex, a colleague of Lord Shelford's in the Cabinet, came one day to luncheon with his sister, Lady Victoria Vincent, but to Margaret's disappointment she did not get speech with them. She had heard much about the brother and sister, and was sorry for her loss.

At Easter came Lord Shelford's term of Court waiting, and Margaret was to go back to her grandmother for a fortnight, while Elizabeth went to visit friends.

Lord Middlesex's place was having electric light installed, and Mallow was put at his disposition by Shelford.

' Well,' observed Lady Victoria, ' politics make us acquainted with strange bed-fellows, but I suppose we may as well accept.'

' Your remark seems to me uncalled for ; it can hardly be considered a quotation,' answered

her brother. 'Certainly I shall be glad to avail myself of the Shelfords' kindness, if it suits your plans.'

'You are getting more old-maidish every day, Archie; you were always prim, but now you talk like a copy-book.'

'Perhaps, my dear, if the person to whom the old maid's cap properly belongs would consent to wear it, I should not have to fit it to myself. But it must be worn by some one of my household.'

Lady Victoria laughed. 'One to you, Archie. Now I am going to call on Lady Saintsbury; I must find out why Margaret Hurst is so much with the Shelfords, and I want my talk before the child is back there. But just tell me why you are so keen on Lord Shelford?'

'He has unusual abilities, though not quite first-rate ones. He is a man by himself, and at any moment his usefulness may be far greater than that of most politicians. Besides, his mind is really original, like himself.'

Lady Victoria grunted, and went off to her call, leaving her brother scanning a rare manuscript.

When the political history of our own time comes to be written, Lord Middlesex will be as perplexing a figure to students as he appeared to his contemporaries. His training and tradition were unique among statesmen of the moment; he was the head of a great house whose men had played a prominent part for many generations; his influence in those

London circles that between them set in motion most of the work of the Empire was admittedly as great as any living man's ; if he had but held up his finger he could have had a big position in the country, yet he was content to hold Cabinet rank in an office which both political parties regarded as giving him insufficient scope.

' Our Marquis ' in the North was a name to conjure by ; the slight, small, alert peer with the quick eyes was recognised as a man by every hulking bully in his mines, by every sporting publican in his villages, by every steady operative in the big towns where he was ground landlord on such a large scale. His property was immense, and concentrated in the North ; in Middlesex he had only Vincent Park, the beautiful place within a motor drive of London, where he spent so much time and entertained so well. But he never seemed to use his advantages, and if he had set a higher value on himself he would perhaps have been of more use to his generation. He was a great contrast to Lord Shelford, the man of lesser position who had little save himself to help him at the start and had got the very utmost out of life. Not so Lord Middlesex. Yet if he had not been a man with nothing to gain, he would not have had so much trust reposed in him. The explanation of the ' thus far and no further ' in so many lives is just the old tag, ' on a les défauts de ses qualités.' On the other hand, ' on a aussi les qualités de ses défauts.' If Lord Middlesex had too many interests to allow

him to concentrate, his personality appealed to a greater variety of people. He had won the Grand National himself on a horse of his own breeding in his time ; and now his racing colours were as popular as any in the country. His knowledge of the capitals of Europe—he had begun life as a diplomatist—was somehow still up-to-date ; he excelled as a linguist, and Middlesex House was thankfully regarded as a sure card to play when foreigners of distinction were in London. He felt it was a duty to keep up the reputation for knowledge of art which his forbears had enjoyed ; if he spent more time in sale-rooms than an absorbing political career would have allowed, the Vincent collections were added to as ably for his nephew as if he had had a nearer heir. Much time was spent on shoots on his moors in the North ; but when he had guns there more than one corner in English history was safely turned, unsuspected by the public, who merely read in their papers that the Marquis of Middlesex had a shooting-party at Hastonbury. His ability was as great as his independence, and in a crisis his nerve was unequalled. His sister once said to him : ‘ Archie, you have too many interests to make one of them paramount ; if you had married and had a stake in the future, you would have seen life in better proportion. I love you enough to wish that you had a wife and children of your own.’

The affection of the brother and sister was a well-known and refreshing fact in a world where

relationships have a tendency to count for less with every year that passes. Lady Victoria was at that time sixty, older by three years than her brother, whom in appearance she resembled almost absurdly. She had taken up a position when young of being an advanced woman ; now she was left very far behind, and not a little disgusted. But a habit of saying daring things had become a more or less conscious pose ; she seemed so incautious that people instinctively laid aside their armour with her, yet she was one of the discreetest women in political life. The contrast between her brother's precise ways—in speech as in other things—with her own startling remarks was piquant, and she knew it, and both she and he were quite aware that her conversation did not go as far to shock her hearers as it promised ; it was amusing to watch at a dinner-table the serenity of those who knew Lady Victoria and the anxiety of those who did not. For the rest she was undoubtedly one of the most successful hostesses in London.

As she drew up at the little house in Eaton Terrace, she contrasted it with Bryanston Square, and felt vaguely anxious about Margaret. She was touched as always at the sight of Lady Saintsbury on her sofa, and kissed her warmly.

‘ My dear Victoria, how good of you to come. Now tell me all about things,’ and the old lady settled down to a thorough gossip.

‘ First tell me how you yourself are,’ said the younger woman.

‘Much as usual; Dr. Brown sees very little change. Tell me about affairs.’

‘Oh well, things are just the same, and the criminal folly of the Government is only equalled by that of the Opposition. Expenditure is ruin, but then so is saving. Like Praed,

“I think the Whigs are wicked knaves,
And very like the Tories,
Who doubt that Britain rules the waves,
And ask the price of glories.”’

‘Then politics are much as usual,’ answered her hostess, ‘and you can tell me about clothes; people seem to my old eyes to look as unlike gentlewomen as possible. Even the girls are less modest than in my day. But, of course, I don’t see many people here.’

‘Oh, as for clothes, you must put your modesty in your pocket, if you are so lucky as to have a pocket, or so *démodé* as to have any modesty to put in it. Everything passes; first the *salons* went, now there are no *grandes dames*.’

Lady Saintsbury looked anxious. ‘It seems bad luck for girls to start the world nowadays. I wish Margaret’s mother were home; it’s difficult to know what is best for the child.’

Lady Victoria, to do her justice, did not want to upset her old friend; but she did desire to know why the grandmother had given the girl up to the Shelfords so completely, and she was glad Lady Saintsbury had started the subject of her own accord.

‘She’s an attractive child, the right kind of good looks, and she’s perfectly natural and unconscious of self. Clever, too. Old Shelford’s quite proud of her Latin. I hope she’ll marry, and not wait too long.’

Lady Saintsbury sighed. ‘It’s difficult to find husbands for portionless girls. If they are forthcoming at all they are generally poor. To tell the truth, I wasn’t sorry Margaret should see something of life; Roger Bamfield has been devoted to her in a boy and girl way for years, and I found he was here too much when Margaret came to live with me.’

‘Ah, yes; in the Treasury, isn’t he? I think Archie was at the House with his father. He had not much money, married a D’Arcy and had two children, I seem to remember; but they are all right, and I should think the boy is the kind one would trust a girl to. Of course, you know Margaret runs a bit of risk where she is; what do you think she’ll gain?’

Lady Saintsbury moved restlessly. ‘Well, for one thing, she’ll get training in the give and take of the best society of public workers she is ever likely to meet. Instinctively she will pick up, without that dotting of “i’s” and crossing of “t’s” which explanation necessitates, those differences which should be felt and never expressed.’

Her companion nodded.

‘And she will learn proportion,’ said Lady Victoria. ‘Whatever a woman’s life may be,

and whatever she may lose, the thing that sticks by her longest is that delicate judgment she can bring to bear on everything from men to clothes. Yes, I daresay you're right, and you know the Shelfords better than I do, or at least you have known them longer. What was he like as a young man? He's a very fascinating pagan now.'

'Well, of course, it was a great surprise his going into the City when he had a safe career at Oxford before him, and a brilliant one in so far as scholarship can be brilliant. It was his wife's money that made a London life possible. Naturally he had to give up his College fellowship when he married. It was a still greater surprise that he made a fortune there, and so quickly too. I saw very little of him during those business years. His wife was my friend, and she was much alone at that time. When she died I had Elizabeth with us as much as possible; she was a big girl in her early teens, just at the age when she needed her mother most. There was a lot of talk about him, of course, but in those days it was not the custom for women to know as much on certain subjects as they do now.'

'I understand,' said Lady Victoria. 'It's the fashion now to think that the ventilation of evil is as good as its cure. I am said to have a tongue, but at any rate I have never used it in the discussion of other people's temptations and called it a crusade against vice.'

‘ Will Margaret be safe from such talk ? ’ asked the old lady anxiously.

‘ Perfectly,’ answered her guest, with a rather sardonic smile. ‘ The faster the man, the more cautious he is with a woman he esteems, and especially with a girl of whom he is *épris*. The rule holds good of most men with their favourite “shop,” too. Your real Alpinist seldom talks in as harrowing a way as the amateur ; and as for horses ! Well, just listen to Archie at a dinner-table about something in horse-flesh he cares about ; he never particularises more than by saying, “ such a nice animal,” while I am giving every detail about its pedigree.’

Lady Saintsbury laughed, but she was still troubled.

‘ And bridge, do they play high ? Will Margaret have to be paid for ? I shouldn’t like that.’

‘ No, you are all right again there. To do Lord Shelford justice, he both talks well himself and appreciates it in others ; when he isn’t opening your Margaret’s mind in that way, he’ll be striding round the billiard table for the good of his important health. You know that big house has a full-sized billiard-room behind the drawing-room. It is really the back drawing-room and boudoir thrown into one ; but as it has a separate staircase, Elizabeth, of course, gave it up to him and has the little downstairs room between his study and the dining-room for herself.’

Lady Saintsbury looked surprised.

‘ Does he never play bridge ? ’

‘ Yes,’ announced Lady Victoria, ‘ in an afternoon at the Club ; that suits him better than having it like mixed bathing, as Lawrence Hyde says.’

‘ Who is Lawrence Hyde, dear ? ’ asked the old lady. ‘ I used to know some of the Hydes.’

‘ He is the only child of Lord and Lady Charles. He was a perfect example of *l'enfant terrible*. You remember how much connected that family was with both political parties ? ’ Lady Saintsbury nodded. ‘ Well, one Christmas at the old Duke’s, while the Whig government he supported was in power, his brother-in-law, who had been Tory Chancellor, was staying with him. Little Lawrence came in to dessert, and during a pause at the table, he suddenly addressed the ex-minister. “ What is the difference between a conservatory and a Conservative ? It’s a riddle.” The old gentleman gave it up, and Lawrence triumphantly announced that “ The one is hot in the present, and the other will be hot in the future.” The Duke offered the only reparation in his power, a good whipping for the boy, only, of course, the parents objected, and it never came off. But it was said that the Duke and his brother-in-law became greater friends than ever before ; after that incident they had at last found common ground in their opinion of Lawrence. Now,’ continued Lady Victoria, ‘ he is trying to establish himself as a wit. So far he has only succeeded in making a convention of being unconventional—quite the most boring

convention I know. Unluckily for himself he said one good thing, and has been straining ever since to make a habit of the accident.'

Lady Saintsbury laughed.

'What was that?'

'Oh,' answered Lady Victoria, 'he said of Mr. Stringer, soon after he became leader of the Labour Party, "He is the only man who has succeeded in fitting up the fence as a lounge."'

They both laughed, and Lady Victoria went on.

'Hyde's a friend of Charles Waters, I think. Do you know Mr. Waters? He almost lives with the Shelfords.'

Lady Saintsbury's face clouded again, and Lady Victoria laughed as she said: 'Don't be troubled about that, at any rate. Lord Shelford won't let him have a look in with your darling, so his impecuniosity and his various disadvantages won't matter there. Who is he?'

Lady Saintsbury shook her head.

'I don't know. He seems always to have been about with Lord Shelford, used to spend his holidays as a school-boy. I think an orphan to whom Shelford was guardian.'

Lady Victoria permitted herself a whistle.

'Well,' she remarked, 'I hate those women who stir the sex pie, like the Suffragettes, perpetually with their old maids' fingers. It's the oldest pie there is and needs the least stirring. Your Margaret will be all right, unless she loses her heart to the

old man. Elizabeth Shelford I really like and nearly trust.'

Poor Lady Saintsbury sighed again.

'You don't give me much comfort, Victoria; but, at any rate, you can put me on my guard during the summer, if anything develops that I should know of. Take an interest in the child.'

'Let me see, your mother was my mother's second cousin; well, I'll call cousins with the child, and keep an open eye. And now you will have her here for a fortnight, so you can see for yourself.'

As Lady Victoria got into her motor she privately thought that nothing could play Shelford's hand better for him than the contrast of the poky house in Eaton Terrace while London was empty, with the stirring days in the luxury of Bryanston Square.

CHAPTER VIII

LADY SAINTSBURY IS MORE ANXIOUS

IF Margaret's mind had been full of the Shelfords after the visit to Mallow, her thoughts after her stay in Bryanston Square seemed to be entirely devoted to them. Only she talked far less about them, at least about Lord Shelford. Her grandmother felt a sense of disappointment that, as she vaguely expressed it to herself, 'Things had made no progress.' When a woman such as Lady Saintsbury is debarred from action, her unwise and impatient mind rebels more than usual at her invalid body ; she feels that if she only had the ordinary chances of life, she could promote the interests she has at heart in a way that the other characters in her drama are incapable of doing, even if they could be brought to understand the importance of the said interests. She had got over the fascination which Lord Shelford had exercised over her while he was actually with her, and she was awake to some of the dangerous aspects of his intercourse with Margaret.

The girl seemed altered indeed ; her grandmother had wished her to live more in the world

of people and less in that of books, yet she was far from content at the change when it came. The child alternated between fits of spurious energy, in which she set about tasks which were alike unnecessary and unengrossing, and times of open day-dreaming. For it almost looked as if she could not apply herself to anything which needed concentration; she seemed to choose mechanical occupations which allowed her thoughts to wander uninterrupted round her favourite theme. But even this was better than the long hours spent in listless idleness; anything approaching to apathy was so unlike Margaret's usual ways that her grandmother felt the first stirrings of a fear which was destined to grow to very considerable proportions. The girl herself was half aware of the change in her inner life; she knew that any of her old school friends or teachers would have unhesitatingly pronounced self-absorption as foreign to her character, yet she was either forced to acknowledge to herself that Lord Shelford filled her whole horizon—and this she refused then and afterwards to do—or else she had to own that it was only when stimulated by competition that intellectual interests stirred in her, and that she had no genuine love of books nor pleasure in study. This thought filled her with real alarm, and she set to work on steady reading as soon as she realised that she was drifting into listlessness. She persevered well, but she accomplished tasks, she did not regain her old delight. Lady Saintsbury's fears were

soothed but by no means banished ; her position with regard to her granddaughter's future was indicated by the fact that she was several degrees more gracious to Roger than she had shown herself of late. If all else failed it was possible that he—it says something for Elizabeth Shelford and Lady Victoria Vincent that their tone about Bamfield had really made some impression upon Lady Saintsbury. She felt that if Lord Shelford married Margaret all her anxieties would be for ever at rest ; but if he remained uncommitted and filled the girl's mind and heart to the exclusion of other men, then things would be ten times worse than before. Marriage with Roger would be better than no marriage at all. Still, there was every prospect that all would go well in Bryanston Square, and at any rate the child was to be off her hands for the whole of the season.

During the second week of Margaret's stay in Eaton Terrace, just when her grandmother was feeling more at ease, the resumed reading was almost abandoned for a day or two. The child had received a note from Lord Shelford, and suddenly her whole world was bathed in sunshine. Lady Saintsbury demanded to see the epistle ; Margaret yielded it for inspection with even more reluctance than she showed, but her grandmother found nothing to object to in it, nothing also to account for the delight it evoked.

‘ MY DEAR MARGARET,—Your quick eyes will note that I put no address ; years ago a distinguished

person was staying where I am and wrote a letter with the address upon the paper ; it was a natural enough thing to do, but he never heard the end of it ! Remind me to tell you the story ; this is the reason that I write on a plain sheet. I do not fear that you will give me away, but the little account will start us with a topic we shall both enjoy. I am having a very good time, and hope that all is well with you ; not, however, so well—I confess—as to make you loth to return to Bryanston Square. Age is very selfish, and I want my little friend back for the season ; it promises to be more interesting to me because I shall have a companion who will go through it with untired eyes. This is only to tell you that a warm welcome awaits you, and that I hope you will come for the same in ten days or so. When I leave here I am joining Elizabeth for a few nights.

‘ My homage to Lady Saintsbury ; tell her I shall come and thank her for the loan “ of the young person ” before long. She knows her Dickens, I fancy.

‘ Ever sincerely,

‘ SHELFORD.’

When Margaret had recovered from the joy of this letter, she fell to reading with exceeding energy. She suddenly felt with dismay that she might have been making herself a fitter companion for her idol, that the waste of even this short holiday was unpardonable, when she was so lamentably ignorant.

Roger called about a week before she was due at the Shelfords, and asked her to luncheon on the following Saturday. He proposed that she and his mother should come to the Bath Club, where he and a senior colleague of his should join them. After the meal he suggested that they should go to the Tate Gallery, which had just received valuable additions. Then he hoped she would come home with his mother, and he would escort her in the evening to Eaton Terrace. To Lady Saintsbury's surprise she heard Margaret refusing, alleging want of time as the reason.

The elder lady struck in. 'Nonsense, my dear. You have not been out enough lately. Of course you will go. How kind of Mrs. Bamfield and you,' she added, turning to her guest.

'Do come, Margaret,' he pleaded; 'I don't suppose we shall see you much in the season. Are you going to spend it entirely in Bryanston Square?'

'Yes, I believe so,' was the answer; 'it seems too good to be true though,' and the man felt a stab as he saw the happy far-away look in the lovely eyes. Was it worth while to persuade her to come when she obviously only cared to go out with her new friends? But Roger did not give up his attempt; it was not his way to abandon lightly a course that he was set upon. He continued gently, and Margaret noticed that he spoke earnestly though quietly.

'You will come on Saturday, won't you? We shall be so much disappointed if you don't.'

And I want to show you my favourite pictures in the Tate, and to see if you like them too.'

Margaret told herself that she agreed because she saw that her grandmother intended her to go, but in reality she was glad to accept. She had always taken Roger's devotion for granted, and in a casual way she had a real affection for him and for his mother. She now added: 'I shall enjoy seeing the pictures, Roger; I've always wanted to go.'

'It's good of you to come' was the rather formal answer; but the man looked happier than he had done a few minutes before. 'Then mother will call for you a little before one o'clock on Saturday,' he said; and then turning to Lady Saintsbury: 'She hopes she may find you disengaged and get a little talk with you. I am afraid she gets worse at making calls as she gets older.'

Lady Saintsbury smiled graciously. 'The loss is her friends'; she is always such good company.'

Soon afterwards Roger took his leave. As he walked away he was uncertain whether the visit had caused him more pleasure or more pain.

As soon as the door closed behind him, Margaret fell upon Buckle's 'History of Civilisation.' She was about half-way through, and the book had been suggested to her by a chance word of her monitor's. Certainly if she was going to read it—which, needless to say, Lord Shelford had never contemplated—it was as well to do so in early youth. However much its merits may be questioned,

however wrong it may be proved both in statement and in argument, the book has a certain stimulating quality which a keen girl may find valuable. Lord Shelford set his mark upon Margaret Hurst's life ; she owed him much—in after years she perhaps exaggerated the debt in some directions—but it is doubtful whether she ever quite realised the value to a clever impressionable girl of the literary instinct that such a man could rouse and satisfy. Lord Shelford had trained himself to calculate his methods, and yet to retain an appearance of spontaneity ; perhaps it was more than the appearance, because his unusual health served him well and kept the buoyancy of his temperament in the ascendant all through his life. And it is certain that he retained until the last the power of recklessness ; he could run risks when in no other way could he hope to gain his ends ; it says much for an elderly man, who counts his words in life as he does his cards at play, that the highly trained caution existed side by side with the latent recklessness and did not stifle it. The same characteristic opposing forces of mind were found in other directions ; for instance, though his stronger motive was usually an interested one, and his weaker motive the disinterested one, yet his secondary impulses were always stronger than the primary desires of most men, and so it was given to him to effect more good than he 'either desired or deserved.' His value as a politician was unique ; it was easy enough to understand with the key

to his character ; even without that key, it was obvious that so much vitality must tell. In such a small matter as his dealings with Margaret's reading, he used his methods as happily as in bigger things ; when he took to reading Latin with her he was emphatically the master dealing faithfully with his pupil ; when the two talked of books, he treated her as of equal mind with himself, though of necessity his inferior in width of knowledge. He had a way of reading a few pages to her, lending to the print the magic of his voice, and taking for granted that she would make the whole of the book her own. To his reading of ' Dream Children ' she owed her love for the rest of the essays.

How much Roger surmised of the fascination which had entered Margaret's life, it is hard to say ; he had made it his business to inquire about Lord Shelford from various quarters, and he had learnt enough to know that, if the great man should care to be a rival, he, Roger, would run small chance of success. For Bamfield was beginning to realise, in his slow way, that he loved Margaret Hurst ; it was not so much that it had come to him, as that it had always been there, and in all probability always would remain the strongest part of him.

He took some trouble with his little luncheon party, himself sending to the Bath Club a bunch of flowers for the table. Mr. Scott was an old friend of Mrs. Bamfield's, and Roger found it easy to take Margaret round the pictures when they got to the Tate Gallery, and to keep alone with

her as long as they remained there. The girl was a little inclined at first to talk the elementary technical jargon of the student, but she soon had the wit to discover that Roger knew more than she did, although he always considered himself rather a Philistine in artistic circles. He was amused to see how utterly blind Margaret was to the beauty and poetry of Millais' 'Ophelia.' To her the dress was a sufficient bar to keep her from understanding the charm of that unique masterpiece; the utmost that Roger could extract was that the flowers were exquisitely painted. On the other hand, Watts gave her keen delight; and she felt great admiration for Rossetti and Burne-Jones. Yet to Roger's surprise she could neither understand nor feel the value of Leighton's statue, the 'Sluggard,' although some of his pink and white pictures greatly appealed to her. At last they found common ground in the Turner room; for a space they enjoyed without discussion or analysis. They stood for a long space before 'The Fighting Téméraire,' and at last Roger spoke as simply as usual, and said: 'I hope I shall never be able to look at that canvas without feeling a lump in my throat.'

'It makes one so proud of being English,' answered the girl; 'it seems so rich in so many ways that if one might only keep a few pictures in the world, surely it would be one.'

'I hope we shall keep the right to be proud of being English,' he said.

Roger sighed. He turned to that wonderful picture of a primitive railway engine which one feels is a class by itself.

‘Doesn’t that give the lie to those who say that there is no poetry in mechanical invention?’ he asked. ‘How hard it is to give men their due! I found myself despising Ruskin for his views on machinery, and yet, however I grudge to acknowledge it, England owes him a debt. Strange that the man he admired so much in art should have contradicted effectively Ruskin’s own pet theory.’

‘I suppose he was a real power in his day?’

‘I don’t know about a power exactly,’ answered Bamfield, ‘except that he gave England “furiously to think.” And as for his day, it was over no sooner than other people’s. The swing of the pendulum is rather unfair, I always think; first a man’s work is overpraised, and then neglected or forgotten.’

‘At any rate, Roger, you will never be guilty of exaggeration either one way or the other,’ replied his companion, and poor Bamfield was left in a pleasing uncertainty as to whether a tinge of contempt or more than a tinge of boredom had prompted Margaret’s remark. Characteristically he took no offence; the girl thought him thick-skinned; it usually takes a woman some time to realise that a quiet man with a dull manner may be extremely sensitive. Occasionally she feels legitimate disappointment at the failure of her efforts to make him exhibit emotion; she is apt

after repeated trials to realise suddenly, and with some alarm, the havoc she has wrought in his life.

It is to be hoped that Mr. Scott and Mrs. Bamfield found their conversation easier than did their juniors. Roger's mother seldom found intercourse with anyone difficult or constrained; but when she and Roger had taken Margaret home with them to tea, she was forced to admit to herself that the girl was by no means in her happiest mood. Perhaps the elder woman was unconsciously hard on the younger one; Mrs. Bamfield was chilled by Margaret's polite indifference to her friends; and by the gratitude which could not take the place of the old warm friendliness. If she could have seen below the surface, she would have realised that Margaret was in the transition stage which comes with young womanhood; that time when all a girl's thoughts and feelings are, as it were, in the melting-pot. But Mrs. Bamfield naturally saw only what was shown her, and she felt quite unjustifiably annoyed at a little incident at the close of Margaret's visit.

It happened that she had been near the young people when Roger was trying in vain to interest Margaret in the noble work that Leighton has put into the 'Sluggard'; she overheard Margaret's rather dogmatic slighting of its value. When Margaret was in Roger's den borrowing a book, she caught sight of a photograph and inquired what it was. Roger explained that it was of

Michael Angelo's 'Prisoner,' which Lord Shelford had told her was one of the chief ornaments of the Louvre.

'Oh do let me look,' the girl exclaimed; 'Lord Shelford told me it was a magnificent thing. Yes, it's glorious, the desperate struggle, the breaking heart—it's all there.'

'Yes, it's all there, even the almost surrender,' said Roger rather bitterly. 'But it remains almost, not quite,' he added to himself.

His mother heard the almost inaudible words—it is a way mothers have. Mrs. Bamfield was singularly dense as to the comfort of those around her, but she recognised suffering wherever she saw it, and her sympathy seldom failed to go out to it. Her heart swelled now at the note of pain in her boy's voice, and she felt a not altogether unreasonable indignation. Yet it is probable that Roger was the only one of the three who was sorry when Margaret was back in Eaton Terrace.

The time drew near for the return to the Shelfords, and Margaret read almost night and day. She was improved, however, in small things; when Lady Saintsbury spoke to her, she left even the most thrilling passage immediately; in her younger days she had often been told that she did not take interruptions well. Now the self-control that living in the world generally instils had come to Margaret in little ways; she had always had it in the big things of life. She managed even to keep her joy to herself at the return to Bryanston Square;

this she did for fear Lady Saintsbury should feel that she rejoiced at parting from her. It had the effect, however, of calming her grandmother's suspicions ; what good manners concealed was taken by Lady Saintsbury to be non-existent.

CHAPTER IX

A DINNER AND A STORY

‘Ask Middlesex and Lady Victoria to dinner,’ said Shelford to his daughter. ‘We’ll give Margaret a pleasant evening, easy and intimate. She wants bringing out, she doesn’t take her share enough.’

‘Will you have anyone else?’ asked Elizabeth.

‘No, just Charles and ourselves,’ replied her father. ‘I hope Lady Victoria won’t be very strenuous, and I do trust she won’t say anything too daring for Margaret to hear.’

Elizabeth’s look at him was peculiar. ‘I don’t think you need be afraid, father; Lady Victoria is a gentlewoman. Lawrence Hyde says many can administer two fingers with as much finality, none with so little offence. That ought to prove it.’

Shelford laughed rather ruefully. ‘To tell you the truth, I sometimes think I shouldn’t get more than three fingers myself if it were not for Middlesex,’ and he went off without offering Elizabeth the chance to contradict him: probably he knew that she would not have taken it. But, at any rate, she served him loyally behind his back, and he knew her value. If her affection was

greater than her respect, it says something for both of them that it was strong enough to outlast many of her illusions.

She went to the telephone and secured the Vincents for the next night; she mentioned to Waters that he must make no engagement, and sent Mrs. Drew to see that a frock of Margaret's, which her father had praised, should be all ready for the following evening. No one could do fine ironing like Nurse.

Margaret was much pleased that the great Lord Middlesex was coming quietly to dinner; as the party was so small she should really hear him talk.

'You and Margaret must separate,' said Lord Shelford, as Waters brought her in to dinner. 'Come on my other side, my dear, and you go between Lady Victoria and Elizabeth, Charles.'

Lord Middlesex looked kindly at the girl as he sat down beside her.

'How is Lady Saintsbury?' he asked. 'She must miss you very much.'

Lord Shelford answered for her, almost as if he were defending her from implied blame.

'Oh Margaret goes constantly to see her and is the best of granddaughters. What did she say to you to-day about the Suffragettes, my child?'

'Oh she said she didn't mind so much being unable to walk, now that all the best pictures and buildings have just been closed because of English-women.'

‘If my august godmother were alive,’ announced Lady Victoria loudly, ‘it’s my belief she’d have them flogged, and quite right too.’

Lord Shelford turned to her wishing that he had been allowed a little breathing space before being called upon to grapple with her strenuousness.

‘If women only knew how much they stand to lose,’ he began, when Lady Victoria took him up.

‘If they only knew what they are screaming about, some of them would have the sense to hold their tongues. I should like every woman over thirty made to read the first half of “Esther Heureuse.”’

Lord Shelford had had a tiring day, but this bomb did not allow of his waiting even for the champagne.

‘I don’t know,’ he replied; ‘the knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom, we are told, and, if it were, the folly of some of us would be still more inexcusable.’

Lord Middlesex stole a glance at his sister, fearful of how she might have taken that particular quotation from that particular man. She reassured him with her blindest smile.

A timid voice beside him said: ‘That’s very beautiful, where does it come from?’

‘It’s in the Book of Wisdom, Miss Margaret,’ said Middlesex, ‘in the Apocrypha. Do you know any of the books?’

‘I am afraid not,’ said the girl, looking rather ashamed.

‘ There’s quite time enough before you for that,’ said Shelford, ‘ and for Balzac too. But I could find things of his you could read, if you like to try them.’

‘ All very well, Shelford, but take care she can understand them. Unless she knows the difference between a bill of exchange and a promissory note, she’ll be awfully out of it.’

Elizabeth turned to Lord Middlesex. ‘ Thank you for that,’ she said. ‘ I thought I knew French as well as an Englishwoman need until I read Balzac; then my own ignorance shamed me.’

‘ Don’t let it trouble you, but if it does, get Waters to explain all that concerns the law relating to finance. It will take him some time, and he must make clear to you wherein the shadiness of certain transactions lies. Then it will give him some trouble to make you understand all you should know concerning mortgages, and there’s plenty to learn about the law of real property. Finance is a fruitful subject. Make him do the job thoroughly in French and English while he’s about it.’

Waters laughed, and Lady Victoria asked, rather as if she were putting a pistol to each individual head; ‘ What is the best short story ever written ? ’

‘ “ La Grande Bretèche,” ’ answered Shelford promptly before Lord Middlesex could advance ‘ Wandering Willie’s Tale.’

‘ I don’t agree,’ said Lady Victoria. ‘ I think “ Matteo Falcone.” “ Lokis ” is good, but the other’s better.’

‘Prosper Mérimée didn’t manage his horrors as well as Balzac,’ said Lord Shelford. ‘Balzac’s proportion is so unerring.’

‘But look how he piles on the agony! It’s the last straw that breaks the camel’s back, and it’s the sordidness that revolts me. Nothing’s worth while if you’re made to live in the worst company,’ said Lord Middlesex.

‘Still,’ said Shelford, ‘he’s a giant, and nothing proves it more conclusively than the inferiority of his disciples. He has restraint, they haven’t. And he has idealism of a sort. He must have been wonderfully interesting to meet; I once was with a man who had known him.’

‘And did you once see Shelley plain,’ whispered Charles to Elizabeth.

‘Very plain,’ she answered smiling, ‘if the great Honoré’s pictures are to be trusted. But it’s no good quoting that except to me. Margaret is too young for that author to have risen yet on her horizon, and the others are of those who are too blind to see.’

Lord Middlesex and the girl were discussing his race-horses, and in particular a famous one, and Margaret’s cup was full of pleasure.

‘She’s a very nice animal,’ the owner was saying, ‘you’ll see her at Ascot. I’ll take you up to pat her, if you like.’

Shelford looked at them, and slightly raised his voice to attract attention as, in answer to a question from Lady Victoria, he replied :

‘No, my friend was most disappointing about him. He had nothing new to tell me, nothing even interesting. But he did tell me a tale that in Balzac’s hands would have been good material for a short story.’

‘Let’s have it, Shelford,’ said Lord Middlesex, ‘if it won’t frighten the ladies.’

‘Don’t be tiresome, Archie,’ said his sister. ‘Where did you meet the Frenchman, Lord Shelford?’

‘We met in a little inn when I was travelling in Corsica——’

‘Where’s that?’ interrupted Lady Victoria. ‘Now don’t all pretend to look shocked; nothing is so refreshing as ignorance, one’s own as well as other people’s. When I want a fresh sensation, I look at a map. It’s a perpetual surprise to me.’ She looked round and calmly remarked:

‘My dear child, you’re last from school, where’s Corsica?’

‘It’s an island in the Mediterranean,’ began Margaret, when Lady Victoria, her thirst for information apparently appeased, went on again.

‘Now, Lord Shelford, let’s have the story. Is it a true one?’

‘Yes, my friend’s father knew the family that it concerns. Well, Margaret, I’ll see what I can do, but it’s years since I thought of it, and I’m rather afraid I’ve forgotten it. But I’ll do my best. Early in the second half of the eighteenth century, a certain baby was left an orphan heiress in a remote

part of France. A distant cousin brought her up, she was a widow, and her little son lived with her at the girl's château. The boy, Henri was his name, was a few years older than his cousin, and from the first had a romantic devotion to her. Nothing would have suited his mother's book better than a marriage between them, but it early became apparent that Françoise would have nothing to say to him in that connection. She was a high-spirited girl, fond of riding, devoted to dogs and horses, rather a dunce at her lessons, handsome in face, with a fine figure. He was a timid creature, no good at manly exercises, but a student *par excellence*. It must have been a curious household; the young Marquise was by nature headstrong, but with such a sweet disposition that the old *curé*, who taught and loved her, said that her self-government was greater than the taking of many cities. The cousin was neither a wise woman nor a kind one; she sneered at her son for being a bookworm, and gave herself the airs of a poor relation, in spite of all that her niece could do to soften the position. In fact she had a grudge against life.'

'Then she probably outlived everyone in the story,' interrupted Lady Victoria. 'Nothing gives such a hold on life as a grudge against it.'

'Perfectly right,' said Lord Shelford, 'she lived to see Napoleon master of Europe, and died at an advanced age and doubtless in the same querulous humour. In due time the Marquise married a neighbour, a handsome fellow from all

accounts, and an expert rider, in fact just the man to appeal to Françoise, who held bookishness cheap, and had seen the baron lick every other boy in the neighbourhood for years, a favour from herself often being the cause of the fight. She was by now the mistress of a great fortune, the long minority having improved the property. Her husband was a younger son and brought little to the *ménage* beyond the habit of spending. The widowed cousin, handsomely pensioned, departed, bewailing herself loudly. For Henri, who had never dared to breath a word of love to his adored lady, was found by good luck or influence a diplomatic post sometime before the wedding, so the young people started married life unhampered by relations.'

'I thought Mr. Waters was the only person who ever had the luck of no relations,' put in Lady Victoria, 'and he hasn't made use of the advantage it gives him as a marrying man.'

'I'm sorry you think I've no others, Lady Victoria,' laughed her victim, and Margaret, her great eyes fixed on the narrator, felt indignant at the interruption.

Lord Shelford continued: 'Poor Françoise found that her husband did not confine his pursuits to dogs and horses. He wasted her substance, came into her presence the worse for drink, and neglected her for others. The old *curé* stood by her, as in those times the *curés* sometimes did; his fatherly love kept her from despair, and brought out the nobility of her character. Rumours reached

Henri of the state of things at what had once been his home ; on the plea of wanting to see his godson he came back soon after her only child was born, but the husband used his presence as an additional means of insulting poor Françoise, and the visit wasn't repeated. The *curé*, who knew of Henri's long and hopeless love, promised to acquaint him if he could ever help his lady. He added that the mother's love for the child was such as to make her life worth living, in spite of all her griefs. The years went on, the property dwindled, Françoise lost much of her beauty. In that far-off part of the country it was long before people realised what the rumours of disturbance meant, but slowly and surely the Terror came nearer. The baron was not loved on the estates ; his bullying ways were a bye-word, and his treatment of his wife did not endear him any the more. At last the horrors which afflicted that unhappy country like the plagues of Egypt came within earshot of the old château. Françoise wrote to Henri in England to get her boy out of the country ; somehow he managed to get the lad his own post, or, at any rate, a place in the embassy. When he had settled him to his duties, Henri came back. The manner of his return had the dramatic touch proper to the short stories we were considering. He found the country-side so unsafe that, but for his being able to disguise himself and speak the patois, he could never have reached the château. When he got there it was

undergoing an irregular sort of siege ; obviously it could not stand out long. Henri got in by a small passage he remembered as a boy ; if he had been a bigger man he could not have got up the disused conduit as he did. When he reached the outer court, he heard the baron's voice speaking to the ringleader of the rebels through the grating of the outer door. " If I surrender to you, do you promise me my life and a safe passage to England ? " Henri did not wait. He got upstairs to the room in the tower which had been Françoise's special sitting-room all her life. He found her on her knees. Her first thought and word was for her son ; Henri reassured her. He gave hardly a moment to her changed looks—she was over forty now and looked much older. His plan was forming itself already in his head, her next words crystallised it into clearness. " If only they burn the château, I don't mind ; my husband has sworn to me he will not surrender. If it were only the men of our own country-side that this madness has come upon I should not fear the worst, but rebels from other parts are with them, and there is nothing they will stop at." " See here, Françoise," said Henri, " I will give you this pistol. Take it in your hand, so. Let me kiss your fingers in token that you pardon my putting anything so ugly into them." The cries outside grew louder and Henri knew the time was short.

' Have you heard this story before,' asked Lord Middlesex of Elizabeth. She shook her head.

‘ Look at Miss Margaret’s absorption,’ he whispered, and Elizabeth felt a pang as she saw how completely the girl hung on Lord Shelford’s words.

“ Look, Françoise,” Henri went on, “ you hold the pistol so, in case you should ever wish to use it. One can never tell when an odd bit of knowledge will come in handy. Now this finger on the trigger, right. You don’t mind my hand covering yours ? You raise your arm a little, so.” Henri’s quick ear detected under the shouts and cries, a dull, sullen, withal triumphant, roar that had not been there before. He continued bending her arm up and then back. He was still kneeling beside her chair, but now he got upon one knee. “ Dear Françoise, I only teach you this to make you feel that you have a safe way out in any event. The castle has held out against stronger armies than this.—Not against modern weapons,” he added to himself ; “ even if her husband were not a poltroon, all would be over soon.—Are you sure your finger is on the trigger ? Yes, I feel it under mine. Lucien is safe, I am going back to give him your love.” With one swift motion he had the muzzle at her temple. Click. His fingers over hers had pulled the trigger. A puff of smoke, and that was all. She was still smiling as she lay back in her chair. He left the pistol in her hand and crept away as he had come. No one knew he had been there. He told her son the story when, not so long after, he lay dying in England of a chill that his puny frame couldn’t shake off. “ I tell it you that you may know the

sort of woman your mother was to inspire devotion in so poor a creature as myself. I would have you know, moreover, that when she lay dead I did not kiss her ; knowing that she would not have permitted it during her life, I did not profane her death with it." That is all,' said Shelford, 'and it goes to show that women seldom appreciate or even recognise worship, which is perhaps one reason why it is not oftener offered them.'

'I've dropped my fan,' said Lady Victoria to Waters. 'Did you ever hear that story before?' she asked under cover of his bending towards her to pick it up.

'No,' he answered.

'I thought not,' said his neighbour. 'Ce n'est pas de Tocqueville, c'est de moi,' and their eyes met in a clear gaze of understanding.

CHAPTER X

THE LUST OF THE EYE

ELIZABETH had been struck by Margaret's demeanour during Lord Shelford's telling of his story. It was not merely that the girl was absorbed in what he said ; she was dominated by his personality. Elizabeth was so well used to anxiety that she did not take it very hardly ; she believed also that her father's attachment to the girl was a genuine one. She was too sane a woman not to have known that his re-marriage was on the cards ; characteristically she congratulated herself on the years she had had as head of his house. She quietly determined not merely to accept but to welcome his love for Margaret ; her woman's eyes discerned the girl's value, and she realised that if she helped this marriage forward faithfully she would have the reward of continued love and intimacy. She had a very just appreciation of Margaret's worth, and she added to it a warm personal affection. She still had a fear that her father might teach the girl to love him and then tire of her, in spite of her hopes to the contrary, but she had a far stronger fear that he would bear too hardly on Margaret

for the very reason that he did really care for her enough to marry her. Yet, almost as keenly as her father himself, she recognised that Margaret must pay some price ; all she had to offer were her youth and her devotion, and these she must yield ungrudgingly to the great man before he could safely throw the glove. Naturally the daughter in Elizabeth felt keenly the good fortune of this mere child ; yet the woman in her knew that the stake required was a heavy one, no less than complete and unconditional surrender before she was even asked for her love, much less offered his own.

‘ All the same,’ mused Elizabeth, ‘ it is a happy lot for a girl to give herself early, and to unite hero-worship with wifely devotion. And she will outlive him, and be rich in memories before she is poor in hopes ; yes, I envy her good fortune, but I don’t grudge it her. After all, I have had a full life in many ways. If it has been empty in others, none of us have everything. Charles has never married, and he and I are friends. That is much to say. And father and I shall continue comrades, and that again is much.’ She sighed, but not sadly, and her look recalled Lord Shelford’s when he allowed himself a grim smile. ‘ I must ask my future *belle mère* to call me by my name ; the sooner it’s done the quicker one of the steps will be taken—necessary, however small.’

Only in the sense of making the best of things was Elizabeth a worldly woman, but she had lived such a worldly life that it never really struck her

how much Margaret's good fortune as Lord Shelford's wife would be minimised by the disparity of age.

At that moment Margaret entered the sitting-room ; one of the girl's pretty ways was that she was never too sure of herself and always grateful for a welcome.

' Am I disturbing you ? ' she asked anxiously. ' Shall I come back later ? '

' No, I was just thinking of you ; sit down and shut the door. My father says you ought to be presented at the next Court ; you see your grandmother can't do it, and your mother and Sir Mortimer's wife are away. I, of course, am unmarried, and so is Lady Victoria, who is a connection of your mother's ; and we think, on the whole, that Lady Alston is the best person. I have telephoned to her, and she can arrange it, and get you the *entrée* for the occasion, so that you and I can go together.'

Margaret gasped ; it all sounded so easy, and yet it was so different from the whole of her past life. She had always been lonely, always aware that she had not quite the same firm footing as the girls who had parents and home at command. Latterly, she had felt positively in the way at her grandmother's, and now, not six months since she had learnt with dismay that her place as a daughter was to wait two more long years for her, she was suddenly given advantages which she could not have had at home.

Lord Shelford truly said to Elizabeth that Margaret showed her breeding by enjoying

everything, yet taking nothing for granted. 'She is neither awkwardly strange which would be a bore, nor too self-possessed which would savour of familiarity.' Like many men, Lord Shelford was amused by talking to women whose ways he would not have tolerated for a day in his own household. 'They think that it's brilliancy, but I know that it's only boldness,' he remarked to Margaret about the talk of two well-known sisters, whose mental endowment Lord Shelford appraised more justly than they did.

Elizabeth continued before the girl had found her voice: 'You needn't go again until you are married, and it will save your people trouble.'

Margaret's thanks came in a flood, which were suddenly checked by a truly feminine thought. She knew that her slender dress allowance was not intended for Court functions, and she exclaimed with dismay: 'But my gown!'

Elizabeth's delicacy, as well as her generosity, were employed to smooth over this difficulty; she produced material for frock and train which she alleged she had bought at the winter sales, and for which she asked Margaret a ridiculously small price. When the girl was comforted by having paid—as she thought—for the stuff, her friend explained that Nurse had nothing to do and would like to make them up; so Mrs. Drew fitted them, and a Frenchwoman, concealed at the top of the house, did the work. Elizabeth's personal allowance was extremely handsome, and some

womanly feeling made her choose that Margaret should not be paid for yet by her host, well as she knew that a word to him would have brought the child all and more than all that was needful. Her equipment for riding was on a different basis ; that and her horse it was obvious Lord Shelford should pay for, since she rode by his request and for his pleasure.

During that June, Margaret felt that she was a mortal who had strayed for a while into fairyland. She said to herself that the changing scenes of her present days contrasted with her past life, as the melting colours in the dense throngs at Ascot contrasted with the peaceful green riband of the course between its crowded borders. She had her moments of sharp distress, even in the midst of her brightest hours ; but as they were due to Lord Shelford, her sweet and natural simplicity took them as evidence of his just wrath at her shortcomings, and she was grateful for his interest even when she suffered for it. They went three days to Ascot, and one such pang she endured on Cup Day ; she felt then that she would never see a race-course without the memory of his anger stinging her like a whip, and probably she was right in her surmise. Her transgression was in this wise. The Shelford party was taken to luncheon in the Guards' tent by Mr. Vincent, a young subaltern in the Grenadiers, a nephew of Lord Middlesex. Lady Victoria and her brother were lunching in a more exalted quarter. Denis Vincent was a nice

boy and rather encouraged in Bryanston Square ; he was too young to be dangerous as a lover, and made a companion for Margaret whose attendance was natural in the eyes of the world. Lord Shelford did not intend to give a handle to gossip sooner than was inevitable. Before the parade for the Hunt Cup, both the parties forgathered in the paddock ; Margaret's great wish was fulfilled, Lord Middlesex himself taking her to pat his horse. Then the friends drifted apart ; Lady Victoria and Elizabeth sat down for a moment under the trees, Charles Waters strolled off with a friend, Lord Middlesex, who never betted, stayed for last words with his trainer and jockey, Lord Shelford went away to send a wire to his bookmaker, and Denis Vincent and Margaret found themselves alone.

‘ I say, you know, Miss Hurst, you ought to have something on this time. Everyone's keen on the Cup race ; just let me help you.’

Margaret gave a happy smile as she turned towards him.

‘ But I don't know how to bet, we didn't learn such things at school.’

The boy laughed. ‘ It's quite easy, especially for you. Providence points out that you should back my uncle's gee ; and then you ride so early every morning that she's specially appropriate to you ; her name is “ Up Betimes,” you know.’

‘ Yes, I do know that,’ said the girl, ‘ as I have just been to pat her. What I still don't know is how to bet.’

‘ Well, I’m backing her ; just let me put half a sovereign on for you. It’s an awfully good name for a winner, isn’t it ? The worst is she’s such a hot favourite that her starting price will be very poor. Now do let me, you’ll enjoy it so much.’

‘ Yes, please do,’ she answered ; ‘ that is fun.’

By this time they were near the telegraph office, and she waited while her companion filled in his form. When he had handed it in he rejoined Margaret, saying :

‘ Well, I hope you’ll win your first bet, and plenty more after that.’

‘ May I ask what Miss Hurst owes you ? ’ said a voice that made Margaret positively tremble.

Lord Shelford towered above the two young people ; like all his race, Denis Vincent was small. Margaret looked appealingly at her hero, but he completely ignored her. His face was sardonically amused, but his voice betrayed his anger.

‘ Oh really it’s nothing,’ said the miserable boy ; ‘ perhaps she’ll win, and anyhow she needn’t pay.’

‘ She is not going to pay you, I am,’ announced Lord Shelford ; ‘ as I am in a hurry, kindly tell me the sum.’

Denis mumbled it, and Lord Shelford silently put it into his hand. Then for the first time he looked at Margaret.

‘ After the next race, please meet me with Elizabeth at those railings,’ and, raising his hat, he pressed forward to send his own wire.

‘ Oh, I say, I am most awfully sorry,’ said poor

Denis ; ' I'm afraid I've got you into trouble. The old gentleman seemed quite angry ; of course, it's all my fault. Will he say anything more about it; do you think ? '

' I don't know,' answered Margaret, and her throat felt strangely uncomfortable, so that she could scarcely speak. Vincent looked hurriedly at her, and saw that she was quite pale. He took her to Elizabeth and Waters, and then went to where he knew his aunt was sitting.

' I've got that poor girl into trouble with the ogre,' he began, and proceeded to tell Lady Victoria the main facts of the case. ' Will he come down on her ? ' he wound up by inquiring.

' Like a ton of bricks,' answered his aunt cheerfully. ' Never mind ; she'll probably never back a horse again, and a good thing too. Do you know what " Up Betimes " is at now ? '

For an instant Margaret forgot even Lord Shelford in the supreme excitement of seeing ' Up Betimes ' carry Lord Middlesex's colours past the winning-post a good length before any of her competitors. But the pain came with redoubled force after the momentary oblivion, and she felt that she had paid heavily.

Elizabeth knew that her father gave Margaret a bad moment, though she did not hear what he said. As they went to tea later on, they passed near Lady Alston.

' Have you done any good, Lord Shelford ? ' she asked.

‘ Yes, I’ve had an excellent day. And you ? ’

The lady laughed. ‘ Everything I touched was useless, I must be bankrupt by now.’

‘ Hard luck,’ said Lord Shelford, and he added, as she turned to other friends for sympathy: ‘ That’s a really nice woman.’

Elizabeth looked quickly at Margaret to see if the girl showed any resentment of this injustice, but her look was as absolutely without rancour as that of a wistful dog. The daughter acknowledged to herself rather sadly that her father knew how to conduct his own business.

One more point was to be made clear to Margaret. Before they left the lawn, while the quartette was standing together, Denis Vincent came up to Lord Shelford.

‘ What am I to do with Miss Hurst’s winnings, sir ? ’ he asked, with a youthful manner, half truculent and half shamefaced.

‘ Spend them on chocolates for her,’ answered Lord Shelford lightly.

If Denis had hoped to draw the great man into serious discussion of the trifle with himself, he was mistaken ; if, on the other hand, he had expected to see any hardness to Miss Hurst which he could legitimately resent, again his calculations were wrong. Lord Shelford was imperturbable ; he never approached criticising Margaret in public, nor sparing her in private. As Denis turned away, Charles Waters followed him with a question about the racing next day. Elizabeth

felt that Margaret's confusion must be considerable as to the ethics of betting.

'My dear father, you'll muddle poor Margaret if you first seem angry at her backing a horse, and then quite pleased about it.'

'Margaret understands what I mean perfectly well,' answered Lord Shelford, and his voice had a note of weight and gravity which did not escape his daughter. 'A lady can never shelter herself behind a man, nor let him take personal responsibility for her. Adam's whine about Eve and the apple remains a true bill, however dishonourable its use was; "The woman whom thou gavest me" is a male excuse without a parallel for the other sex.'

Elizabeth sighed, but Margaret looked up bravely.

'After all, if one has made a mistake, excuses don't make it better.'

Lord Shelford smiled. 'Hold fast to that, my dear, and you won't go far wrong.' His eyes looked into hers with affection, in which also mingled the respect that he was always capable of feeling for courage and for truth. And Margaret felt, as he knew she would, that his hold on her was stronger than ever.

It was to her simple and genuine nature, even more than to her good looks and quick wits, that Margaret owed her attraction for her host. It is not really uncommon, the desire to find in others what we lack ourselves. An axiom of Lord Shelford's,

'A man and a woman may make a very strong combination,' was proof of his acceptance of this platitude. He was not as a rule prone to take much notice of girls, save to treat them with a shade more of courtliness and less of deference than he showed to older women. He once remarked to Charles that he 'had never seen a girl that would not be the better for fining down or filling out,' and there is no doubt that until he saw Margaret Hurst he had never contemplated marriage with a very young woman. Certainly the desire to leave an heir to his name and his wealth had been growing in him of late, and he knew he would have no difficulty in finding a lady who was suitable to the position of his son's mother. Like most men who can easily attract and charm the female sex, he was in turn highly susceptible to that sex himself. Margaret needed to 'put on the whole armour of righteousness' if she proposed to go through the world in her hero's intimate companionship, and yet to keep the instincts and perceptions which are a woman's proudest boast.

The girl felt acutely the difference between her host's position and her own. He had no need to emphasise it, she was aware of it at every turn, so much so indeed that she was more humble than any one except herself would have deemed suitable. After all, she was a good girl, with good brains and looks, good breeding and good health. Lord Shelford was quite aware of her advantages, however much she ignored them herself.

It happened that, in June, Margaret felt considerably 'out of it' rather often; Lady Saintsbury made it clear that she did not welcome Margaret for the evening meal, so when her host and hostess were at dinner parties where she was not invited—which was frequently the case—the girl ate her solitary dinner in the great dining-room, feeling acutely unworthy of the trouble she was giving. She had indeed timidly suggested that she would prefer a supper of poached eggs or potted meat, but she was made to understand that such interference in the ways of the house would be worse than any inconvenience that could be caused. Sometimes she fetched the Shelfords in the car from their dinner party, and the three would go to a reception, or, very rarely, Elizabeth would take Margaret to a dance. Time after time the contrast between Lord Shelford's value in the world and her own unimportance was brought home to Margaret, and she felt it was intensified by her host's scrupulous care that she should always sit beside Elizabeth and he himself on the small seat opposite. He took pains that Margaret should not find his friendship paternal. Sometimes when her father was at a man's dinner, Elizabeth would take the girl to a play; Lord Shelford was easily bored by the drama.

Margaret greatly looked forward to the Court; when the evening came Elizabeth complimented her heartily in her bedroom on her face and figure no less than on her dress. There is no wiser policy

if an older woman wants a younger one to look her best than to praise her appearance ; it prevents the self-consciousness that comes from nervousness. But when Margaret got downstairs, a sudden tremor seized her. Her host was standing in his full-dress uniform ; he wore the locket and star of the Order lately conferred upon him, and its broad ribbon was across his breast ; she recognised how far more brilliant was his own appearance than hers. Margaret stood fascinated by his good looks ; it happened that she had not seen him with his gold lace and sword before. She had admired him in his scarlet coat, riding to hounds at Mallow ; on one occasion when she was there he had dined in pink ; she had seen him in his peer's robes when his daughter had made him put them on to show a foreign guest the costume that a good republican naturally desired to feast her eyes upon, but the child told herself she had never seen Lord Shelford look so grandly handsome before. He was in attendance at the Court. As Margaret went by her host watched her critically, and little as she knew it, she passed muster in his eyes. But though she enjoyed her evening, she felt how vain and presumptuous it would be if she entered into competition with the women around her whom she fancied were the handsomest and wittiest in England. She felt sure that Lord Shelford knew all those who were best worth knowing ; she did not venture to envy, but she did admire the gorgeous pearls and beautiful gowns that she saw, and above all

that air of self-possession that only the consciousness of complete finish in small things can impart. It is a curious fact that as a rule it is the less beautiful women who have that air in perfection ; perhaps things are thus made more equal ; at any rate, we may suppose that this is so from the point of view of the self-possessed.

Margaret was still under the enchantment that a spectator finds in watching the scenes that seem a part of fairyland ; later on, when she became herself an actor, fairyland had somehow receded. The party at the India Office to celebrate the King's Birthday was the dividing line ; it had the disadvantages of both states and the compensations of neither. She was conscious that she was no longer merely a spectator, yet she had not had her rôle as an actor assigned to her. Lord Shelford, of course, gave his ministerial dinner ; Elizabeth dined with Lady Alston, and kindly got Margaret an invitation too. Elizabeth was to receive at one of the doors into the central hall ; Lord Shelford joined her as soon as he could, and stood there, as Margaret felt, a truly magnificent figure. The girl was behind, so placed that she could speak to no one, and she watched all the more. For the first time she felt consciously and impotently jealous ; she saw how the women who knew Lord Shelford took just the few instants more than was their due to make some laughing or whispered remark to him ; she saw his easy mastery of the situation. She saw, too, how well Elizabeth played her part ;

it was an occasion that called more for dignity than for excitement, and Miss Shelford's quiet manner stood her in good stead. She looked handsome too; she was slightly flushed, which made her seem younger. The Alstons and the Vincents were also receiving elsewhere, and there came the moment for the ministers to assemble upstairs to be ready for the procession.

Elizabeth, whose training did not lead to lapses of memory, began anxiously to look for some one who could take charge of Margaret. As she mechanically shook hands with the hundreds that passed she said to herself that all their friends must have gone by other ways. Suddenly she saw Roger Bamfield, and welcomed him joyfully.

'Now will you take charge of Margaret while we are at supper?' she asked, and he, of course, was only too glad.

'I think we will go upstairs now and get good places for seeing the procession,' he said to Margaret, who had just expressed a wish to be shown everything.

Poor man! He should have taken the girl he loved to some quiet seat and let her rest undisturbed by thoughts of processions while he made the time pass quickly for her in happy talk. Instead they fought their way upstairs and got in a bad position in a crush; there they waited, hot and tired, seeing glimpses of the actors in the pageant preparing for their Royal guests. Margaret watched her friends chatting together as they passed to and fro, between the room where they were to

receive the great people and the corridor which was roped off. The Alstons and Vincents were there as well as the Shelfords; the friends with whom the girl was on pleasant terms did not notice her now, and she felt a sinking at her heart. As a matter of fact, no one saw her except Lord Shelford, and he did not appear to do so. She was not in the front row and was not tall; only his quick eyes would have picked her out.

'I hope you are not very uncomfortable here,' said Roger; 'we ought to have come earlier to get a good place.'

'Well, it is no worse for me than for the rest of the rank and file,' answered Margaret gloomily. 'The "inner ring," as that dreadful woman we passed on the staircase calls them, seem to have got all the comfort.'

'I hope the procession won't keep us long,' said Roger, struck by the coldness in her voice.

'At any rate, we can't move now,' replied the girl wearily. 'I suppose it's good discipline for me to be an outsider again; I've done everything so easily lately.'

Roger said nothing; it is probable that he was enjoying himself some degrees less than she was.

At last the procession was formed, and it began to advance towards them, the spectators on either side bending like windswept grass as it took its way between their ranks. Sir Gilbert Alston walked with a very great lady, and Lady Alston was on the arm of a charming and popular prince;

the Vincents and Lord Shelford also had Royal partners; later on came Miss Shelford, paired with the ambassador of a great power. As Lord Shelford passed, both he and his companion seemed to be enjoying the situation more than those who preceded or followed them—so at least it appeared to Margaret. No one noticed the girl—she was not sufficiently well placed to admit of it—but she felt that a nod from any of those who walked so proudly would have prevented her feeling so absolutely lonely on her side of the gulf. When it was all over, Roger took her to supper, and they had another struggle to get into one of the rooms for the general public; when they at last reached the table Margaret did not seem to want anything. Roger was in many ways an unnecessarily humble person, but he was also a man, and felt simply and naturally on all fours with any other man, Secretary of State or no, partly because he did his own job too thoroughly to compare himself and his work with other men in other stations. Naturally, he had no key to Margaret's miserable state of mind, and the difference of sex would have holden his eyes from seeing even if the door had been open.

'You look so white, have a glass of champagne,' he said anxiously.

'I'm quite all right, thanks,' was the quick reply.

The girl's pride meant to hide her pain, but she gave the impression that she was feeling offended with her companion. Roger showed no sign, but he

was none the less hurt. He continued to keep up some apology for conversation, but Margaret made no effort on her side. Presently the throng began to thin, and Roger said :

‘ We have some chance of finding the Shelfords now ; the chief guests are gone.’

Margaret brightened at once into interest and keenness ; when at last they came upon Miss Shelford, she almost ran to join her. Elizabeth thanked Roger simply and heartily for looking after her charge for her. Margaret added a little perfunctory gratitude ; Roger said less than usual as he made his adieux. As he turned away, Margaret noticed a strained look on his face ; suddenly she felt how selfish she had been, but it was too late to make amends.

CHAPTER XI

THE PRIDE OF LIFE

THE India Office reception was the last occasion on which Lord Shelford allowed Margaret to feel outside his life and interests. It frequently happened that he was obliged to let her feel his momentary neglect ; it not infrequently happened that he of set purpose made her suffer it ; but never again did she feel that their respective positions kept them apart. In that subtle way, so hard to define, so impossible to mistake, she felt that, even in his anger, avoidance, or pre-occupation, he was always mindful of her and always aware of her personality. She did not know how clearly she betrayed to his astute eyes that she had learnt the lesson of his importance and of her own insignificance ; she had always known it in theory, on that night she had endured it in practice.

Lady Saintsbury strove to tell herself that all was well with her daughter's child ; as she did not have her to dinner, she only saw her during the perfunctory calls which Margaret's good feeling prompted, and which Margaret's busy life curtailed. Mrs. Hurst's eyes began to long for something

more than the description of Margaret's doings, the account of Margaret's days, which she received alike from her mother and her child. She wrote a warm-hearted letter of thanks to Elizabeth; and received in return charming praises of the girl from her old companion; but she sighed in vain for something more intimate than the journal of busy hours and brilliant scenes.

On the morning after the King's Birthday both the Shelfords saw Margaret's depression. Her host said carelessly:

'Next year we must take you to the Trooping of the Colours, Margaret; it's a pretty sight, though it's generally too hot.'

Margaret beamed; the assumption on her host's part that they would be together next year was like balm to her.

He went on, tacitly assigning her the rôle of participant. His daughter was entering dates in her engagement book.

'Elizabeth, I think I'll ask for an invitation to one of the Court balls for her; I don't want to trouble them for both—which shall it be?'

'The first, I think,' replied his daughter; 'it's the more brilliant as a rule.'

Margaret's eye shone with delight; the one thing which she had ardently wished for was now to be hers. Her ready thanks were stopped by her host.

'My dear, of course we want you to have a good time; you are not one of those who will make

it their business in life, thank goodness. If you were, one would not be eager to give it you.'

The strong, heavy jaw and hard mouth would have kept anyone from expecting leniency; his daughter knew that he recognised quite clearly that Margaret's pleasure in the life she was leading began and ended with the joy of sharing it with him. She turned to her list.

'Are you coming to the Opera, father, to-night?' she asked.

'Why are we going?' said Lord Shelford quickly; music was one of the good things that the gods had withheld from him.

'The Vincents asked us to their box. I accepted for Margaret and myself, but Charles can come if you don't care to; I know he's free to-night.'

'What is it?' inquired her father.

'Mozart, "The Magic Flute"; you'd like it, I think; it has lovely airs, not a blare of sound like modern music.'

'Do we dine at Middlesex House?'

'No, we join them; it's so early, we must have a short meal.'

'All right, I'll come; I like to see Covent Garden once in a way.'

When the Shelfords arrived, the overture had begun, and the Vincents, who were really musical, welcomed them in silence. Margaret was opposite Lady Victoria, and Elizabeth sat between them. The girl listened at first in a perfunctory way, looking around her as well as the lowered lights

permitted. Gradually the music caught hold of her. As the overture died away and the curtain went up, she found herself wishing that they had been in time, and indignant at some people in the next box who were making a late and disturbing entrance. She smiled at herself, for she knew she was not musical in the strict sense of the word. Yet, gradually, as the act went on, her point of view shifted. She had arrived still sore with herself for having taken the India Office reception in so poor a spirit; little by little the self-reproach seemed unnecessary and jarring; such a small thing didn't count in a world where instruments and voices blended as they were doing now. When the lights went up, the Shelfords and Vincents began their greetings, and soon Margaret saw Lord Shelford scanning the house with great minuteness through his glasses. Lord Middlesex asked her if she were fond of Mozart, and found that she knew nothing of him.

‘But I’m enjoying this tremendously, it’s wonderful.’

‘It’s very nice to hear the fiddles instead of only noisy brass,’ said her host. ‘You’ll have a most lovely song in the next act and the words are good too. Let me find it in the book for you. It begins “Qui sdegno non s’accende.”’

Margaret read what he pointed out, and listened to the explanation. Lord Middlesex was pleased with her attention and continued talking to her.

‘Of course, Mozart shows what a pioneer he was

in his orchestration. It's an irreparable loss that he died so young.'

'Did he?' asked Margaret, with the frank desire to repair ignorance, which is so much more attractive than the wish to hide it.

'Yes, he and Shelley, who perhaps are the two people who gave us the most exquisite airs in the world, both died quite early. One wonders what they would have done if they had even had ten years more; but the loss doesn't bear thinking of. However, one is very thankful for what they have left us.' He added more to himself than to her: 'If life "stains the white radiance of eternity," neither of them suffered it for long.'

During the second act Margaret experienced a very strange sensation. She so completely forgot all the irritations of the previous evening that she ceased to regret them, yet a feeling of sadness crept over her which grew with the sweetness of the music. She began not so much actively to think of Roger Bamfield as to be conscious of him in some vague and undefined way; she found that, though the notes banished the things she now considered of value, they persistently brought forward the memories which she strove to call of no account. At last she heard a bass voice soaring, as it seemed to her, into a region which she had once known. A curious regret that she could not get to that region now took possession of her; then, suddenly, she felt a sharp stab and she knew that the unkindness to Roger kept her back.

‘ Qui sdegno non s’accende
E soggionar non sa;
La colpa non offende
Trova l’error pietà ’

sang the voice. Margaret found that she was breathing with difficulty because there was a sensation of tightness in her throat.

‘ Fra noi ciascun divide
L’affanno ed il piacer.’

The girl sat very upright, her figure tense, her eyes and ears straining, ‘ L’affanno ed il piacer.’

‘ Do I know at all which they are, or what they mean? I can’t tell. But I’m sure that Roger knows. Why have I got so far away from him? Is it my fault? I suppose so, for it isn’t his. Did I hurt him, and do I care, or should I do it again? I don’t know, I don’t know.’

When the curtain dropped and the music ceased, Margaret did not move. She sat stiffly in her place, with rather a dazed look. Lord Shelford spoke to her.

‘ There are the Templetons, Margaret; see, in a box opposite in the pit tier. How well she looks.’ He handed her the glasses, but she did not hear, and made no movement to take them. Lord Shelford frowned.

‘ I said, Margaret,’ he began in a cold, clear voice, when his host touched him, and he turned before his words had penetrated to Margaret’s bewildered brain.

‘ Let the poor child alone a minute, Shelford,’

said Lord Middlesex lightly ; ' we are not all born with your healthy contempt for the arts.'

' I have always understood that Margaret was not musical,' was the rejoinder, given rather sharply.

Lord Middlesex lowered his voice and spoke even more quietly than usual.

' Nevertheless, you may take it from me that the girl is learning something to-night. However dim the glimmer that she sees may be, and however weak, yet its spark comes from the same light that shone on Mozart himself.'

It was not often that Lord Shelford felt resentment without being able to show it, and he did not enjoy the situation. Luckily a movement of Elizabeth's brought Margaret to herself, and her mechanical self-control came to her aid. She did not now fail to play her part, but neither did she return to the state which had induced the failure. The music did not again absorb her to the same extent, and when the evening was ended she caught herself feeling that she had been looking through the old kaleidoscope in Eaton Terrace which had been one of the favourite toys of her youth ; now, as then, the shifting colours had been bright all the time, but only once had she seen what her childish words had called that lovely church window, and when it had been shattered by her movement, it would not come again.

The early ride next morning brought back into prominence the advantages of money ; the friends

the party met recalled the value of position. Unconsciously almost, Margaret made up her mind that in her own phrase she would not 'let herself go' again as she had done the previous evening.

In this determination she was greatly helped by the glitter and glamour of the Court ball. Lord Shelford decided that the evening he was procuring for her should be one of complete enjoyment. As far as possible he managed that her pleasures were those that he shared. Thus, when some girls whom she knew asked Margaret to go to Henley with them, Lord Shelford recollected that on the only day for which she was free he had intended to take her and Elizabeth to see some famous pictures at Christie's; of course Henley was no more thought of. Tea on the Terrace was only possible once, because Lord Shelford neither chose to be present himself nor to allow the ladies to go as the guests of anyone else.

Margaret had not many invitations to dances, and of those she seemed only able to accept a few; Lord Shelford discouraged dancing. Yet at the Court ball he saw to it that she danced more than once. The elder Vincent nephew, a neat young man, not quite so small as his brother and uncle, valed with her once, and a young peer, who carefully cultivated all possible relations with Lord Shelford, was her partner also, and more than once. Both Elizabeth and her father twice walked through a quadrille with important partners and illustrious companions. Margaret privately thought that,

though every one looked gorgeous in their finest uniforms, or most lovely gowns and jewels, yet none looked at once so handsome and so distinguished, of such noble carriage and such beauty of feature, of such mysterious fascination and such openly interesting personality as Thomas, Lord Shelford. Of course she could not be with him at supper; but the obliging young peer looked after her assiduously, and from where she stood she could catch glimpses of the Secretary of State for India, which was all that really mattered. She also skilfully drew the talk into the direction where her mind was set; her companion, who hoped much from the favourable notice of Lord Shelford, was nothing loth to sing his praises, trusting that pretty Miss Hurst would repeat them to the right ears. Pretty Miss Hurst listened to this talk more than she joined in it; yet when the young man was about to change the subject to herself, feeling that no woman ought to be able to accuse him of inability to play up to her, he found that somehow the girl headed him back to politics, and then to the politician who filled her horizon.

It was a triumphant evening to the girl; the Alstons and Vincents spoke to her, Lord Shelford presented her to great ladies and to famous men; diplomatists let her divine their admiration, administrators showed it to her more openly. Lord Shelford realised that it was because she seemed, as it were, to belong to him that she played her part so gladly and proudly; to do him credit was now

almost a religion to her. It was a happy evening both to the great politician and to the ex-school-girl.

The weather was now very hot, and Lord Shelford let his ladies off the daily ride on the morning after the Court ball. Thus it came about that Elizabeth and Margaret had leisure for a comfortable talk together in the former's sitting-room, which was seldom the case. True, in the afternoon they often drove together, but conversation was not easy, as they were constantly stopping to leave cards or to go to a party. Margaret hated the crushes in the hot afternoons, but Lord Shelford had told Elizabeth to train her to go to dull parties as well as amusing ones, and also to show her the routine of card-leaving.

'But no one else does it, father,' objected Elizabeth. 'Lady Alston sends her cards round, and Lady Victoria does a certain amount; none of the other ministerial ladies do anything.'

'Their doings, or rather their undoings, don't concern me,' answered her father grimly, 'but yours do. In my opinion, some Cabinet Ministers' belongings must show civility to the wives of the members and candidates, and I don't care how old-fashioned it is.'

He himself never forgot a face, and he was popular in a high degree with the rank and file of the party, both men and women. He gave more dinner parties than his colleagues, and included more undistinguished adherents than they did. Less

clear and observant eyes than Margaret's would have seen how much work was done in that household, and how wide was the area of that work. So that both the elder and the younger woman appreciated the hour of that July morning, when only the writing of a few notes made claim on their time.

'I shall be glad to go North,' said Elizabeth, 'and I am truly thankful that there is no autumn session. We shall have a nice time at Mallow; we shall get there for the first of October, and you must stay with us as much as possible. Later on we shall get such good hunting.'

'It is really too awfully kind of you,' said Margaret. 'I know I must be so much in the way, and you are so wonderful in never letting me feel it. And I know that I add to your day's work; dear Miss Shelford, I do appreciate it; I am very, very grateful, however little I show it.'

'But you show it very sweetly, my dear; and now, do show it still more by calling me Elizabeth. I should like you to feel me a real friend, now and always.'

Margaret could only imperfectly appreciate the unselfishness and reality of that friendship, because she did not know what it cost Lord Shelford's daughter; but as far as the appreciation went, it was both strong and sincere. She was genuinely touched by this suggestion of intimacy from so reserved a woman as Elizabeth; she had a great admiration for her, and felt honoured by her friendship. Elizabeth's affection for Margaret grew

with her knowledge of the girl ; already she was acquiescent in her father's choice, even approving of it. If Charles Waters had cared for Margaret, her feelings would have been very different ; but though he showed her his usual rather indolent kindness, he did not distinguish her in any way. He certainly took Elizabeth's faithful help and service too much for granted, but she was the only person who ever saw his best side, and the knowledge of this was compensation enough. All his futile aspirations, all his imperfect resolutions were kept for her ear, and for hers alone.

He took the two ladies to Lords on the first day of the Eton and Harrow. The Shelfords seldom went away for Sunday ; Margaret had only once returned to Eaton Terrace on that account. Lord Shelford said he was too old to change his habits, and to learn to care for two nights' visits to people he could see in London or at Mallow. He generally looked in at his club between tea and dinner, and he got his bridge there ; he saw his friends at dinner at their houses or his own, and he did not know why he should mix the two occupations to the detriment of both at a country house.

So the three people who were sharing his home went up to the match early on the Friday afternoon, with a promise from the great man that he would join them later on, and that they should all go again the following day. The Vincents had a coach there, and Elizabeth, who was keen on

cricket, took her place on it at once ; but Charles said he would take Margaret a walk round first. The girl knew very little about cricket and was anxious to learn, but the task of explanation seemed almost beyond Waters. Very soon they met a friend of his whom he introduced to Margaret. She had heard of him more than once, but the actual Lawrence Hyde had never before been presented to her, and he struck her as singularly unattractive. There was nothing vicious about him, but he was useless and flippant, and his conceit was of a quite phenomenal character, and so was his tie.

As Charles dropped behind to speak to other friends, Lawrence said in a high voice with a distinct whine in it :

‘ So you are staying with Miss Shelford. I should think it must be rather benumbing ; her conversation seems to me as colourless as her face without its salient features.’

He struck Margaret as beneath indignation, so she remained silent, and luckily Waters joined them almost immediately.

Margaret addressed him pointedly. ‘ I should like to go to the Vincents now, please,’ and the irrepressible Lawrence struck in again :

‘ One is always given to understand that Middlesex is so much more important than he appears. I distrust that kind of person, who bulges with insight, and has nothing else inside him.’ His remark was not answered, and he continued unabashed : ‘ There’s Roger Bamfield over there.

I suppose he thinks that he's the strong, silent man that Meredith made his hero ; he's only fit to be bound up and put on a shelf, like his prototypes. It makes me ill to think how well he means.'

'You are unfortunate in being furnished chiefly with dislikes,' said Margaret, at that moment catching Roger's eye. She smiled eagerly and he came up and attached himself to her. Waters greeted him heartily, and Hyde looked at him so languidly that Margaret caught and responded to an amused glance from her old friend.

Lawrence Hyde's own pleasure in life hardly seemed enough to justify the annoyance he caused to others. He went about saying that he had outlived literature and now meant to take up art as a less banal expression of the soul ; his clothes matched his manners, and both were distinctly less desirable than those he had assumed during his previous pose as a man of fashion. He was an example of the fact that birth and breeding do not always go together ; consciously or unconsciously—and it would be a bold person who could differentiate between the two states in Hyde's mind—he was trying to see how far toleration would be extended to the son of his father. But Lord Charles had possessed a naturally sweet nature, and he had added to it a carefully cultivated mind ; he was prone to errors of judgment, but not to errors of taste. Lawrence bore little resemblance to his parents ; they had always wished

him to be true to his own individuality, and perhaps it was well that they died before they realised what this aspiration involved.

As the party reached the Vincents' coach, they saw Lady Victoria standing beside it. She had just returned from a little walk with her nephews in the opposite direction to that taken by Margaret and Charles ; at a cricket match Lord Middlesex always begged to be discounted, alleging with truth that he came to see the game, the whole game and nothing but the game. The aunt and nephews were on the best of terms, and looked far merrier than did Margaret and her three cavaliers.

' Ah, Mr. Bamfield, how do you do ? Perfect day, isn't it ? ' and Lady Victoria shook hands heartily. ' Come up on the coach and give Miss Hurst a lesson in cricket ; my brother is shocked at her ignorance, but he is too much absorbed himself to amend it.'

She nodded to Lawrence, who immediately said : ' I can't see how anyone can justify wasting their time in watching school-boys play cricket.'

' I don't suppose you can,' said Lady Victoria blandly. ' You never were a school-boy, and I can't imagine for a moment that you ever played cricket. Why do you come ? '

' To see my friends,' replied Hyde, in a whine meant to be ingratiating.

' Then we had better leave you and get up,' replied the lady. ' Miss Hurst will never learn anything at this rate. You must really come

to-morrow when they pitch wickets, Margaret ; then you'll pick up something of the game. Can't you get off early and come to us for luncheon, Mr. Bamfield ? Do manage it ; we should be delighted.'

Roger looked for a moment at the girl to see if her look seconded the invitation. It seemed that it did, for he accepted with a quiet alacrity that found favour in Lady Victoria's rather critical eyes.

'I like Roger Bamfield,' said Lady Victoria to Lord Shelford later on in the afternoon. Her quick eyes watched him keenly, as she added : 'He'll make a good husband to the girl he marries.'

Lord Shelford assented as he focussed his glasses on the game.

Lady Victoria felt baffled, and rather unwisely determined to draw Lord Shelford. This must have been the expression of that fatal curiosity which so often prompts a clever woman to act like a foolish one, for she knew quite well that he would neither betray anything nor tell anything, and that her open nature was no match for his calculating one.

'I wish Mr. Bamfield and Margaret Hurst would come together ; I asked him to luncheon here to-morrow in the laudable desire to help the matter on.'

Lord Shelford put down his glasses and turned to her.

'A very laudable desire, and I should say an

excellent arrangement. I am always in favour of a girl's marrying young ; if it is left too long she often fights shy of the plunge. Elizabeth is an example to hand. But in this case, I hope Margaret will wait until her parents' return ; it's ill work match-making for other people's children, and I don't want the Hursts to turn and rend me.'

Lady Victoria laughed to hide her discomfiture ; if only Shelford would have shown his hand the least possible fraction, she would have known how to read it. This, at any rate, she assured herself, but she had the tardy wisdom to say no more on the subject of Margaret.

The child stayed on at Bryanston Square, and in the quiet days, while London was empty for Goodwood, and after, she drew very near to her hostess. Elizabeth spoke sometimes of her father, of his early brilliance at Oxford, of his success in business, of his political ambition, so amply justified. When the trio parted, it was with the keenest regret on Margaret's part, regret the strength of which she would not have acknowledged even to herself. Many were the hopes of a happy time at Mallow that all three expressed ; to Lord Shelford the season had brought all that he had expected, to Margaret Hurst it had brought infinitely more. But the man's satisfaction was untinged by the melancholy that pervaded the girl's enjoyment, the persistent half-consciousness that it was all a dream. Lord Shelford had no use for dreams.

CHAPTER XII

A DELIVERANCE BELITTLED

MARGARET'S return to Eaton Terrace did not give Lady Saintsbury the pleasure that might have been expected. Both the maids desired to have a fortnight's holiday in August, and the parlour-maid's sister, who 'obliged' during the time, taking both places in turn, was not a person who liked to be put upon.

Roger found Lady Saintsbury feeling more plaintive than usual, and Margaret looking whiter than he had ever seen her, when he called a few days after the girl's return.

'And when do you get away and where do you go?' inquired his hostess.

'We go on the fifteenth, next Tuesday,' answered Bamfield; 'my mother is counting the hours. We have taken a little house on the river near Shillingford; there are always one or two people up at Oxford, and both mother and I love boating.'

'It seems like a dream that I ever saw a field or a stream,' said Lady Saintsbury, and the emotion with which she spoke was genuine.

Both her hearers were moved by it, and Roger's voice was very pitiful as he said: 'I feel put to shame for talking so selfishly; no trial can be so severe or so well endured; please believe that your friends feel more sympathy than they can show.'

Margaret's sweet eyes looked tenderly at her grandmother, and the tears sprang to them. She was always conscious that she did not count for as much to Lady Saintsbury as she should have done, and she loyally told herself that the fault was hers. But Roger, who had the rare gift of seeing things as they are without embitterment, knew that the fundamental weakness in the older woman was an ingrained self-assertiveness. Nothing can please those who feel that the world owes them a debt for which they cannot exact payment.

Bamfield turned to Margaret.

'And what are you going to do? You must be tired after the rush of the season.'

'Oh I'm going to the Shelfords at Mallow later on, but they are in Scotland until the end of September.'

'And shall you be here until then?'

Margaret looked almost timidly at her grandmother.

'If I am not in Grannie's way I shall be here, or I might go back to stay at school for a bit. Miss Williams never shuts up the place entirely; she will be away, but someone is always there.'

Roger thought that the girl would be more

than human if the prospects for her holidays did not throw into still stronger relief the pleasures which she owed to the Shelfords. As he walked away he debated with himself whether he should persuade his mother to invite her to stay with them. Would it be wise to bring them together just now when, mere man as he was, even he was conscious of tension? And would not his own best course be to wait, and not to take advantage of her loneliness? Roger's scrupulous delicacy would have won the day, had it not been for the remembrance of the look of strain in his dear one's face which haunted him persistently.

Two days after his call, Lady Saintsbury received a letter from Mrs. Bamfield asking for Margaret to pay them a fortnight's visit. She named the beginning of the last week in August, and Lady Saintsbury was much pleased. This would save Susan's sister during half of her time as parlour-maid, and make things much smoother.

Once again Margaret was conscious of her grandmother's satisfaction at the prospect of losing her; in some undefined way she felt as if she were asked in order to give Lady Saintsbury the comfort of her absence, rather than to afford the Bamfields the pleasure of her presence. But when Roger met her at the station, the sore feeling all melted away at the sight of the joy in his honest face. For a moment the man's whole soul looked out of his eyes; the proud devotion that asked for nothing in return yet would never cease while

he lived ; the humble supplication that begged for everything as an undeserved free gift. The girl was aware of a change in her atmosphere which she had not felt for many months ; there was peace and rest where Roger was, and though he had a certain austerity of outlook, it intensified rather than diminished the sense of security that his presence afforded. Margaret was thankful to him without understanding the reason for his gratitude ; she was too young to realise what a strain Lord Shelford's methods entailed, how hardly his system of training bore upon her. She had the virtues of loyalty and gratitude to a high degree, and also the happiness of hero-worship ; she would not have owned to herself that the companionship of a man suitable to her own age had a certain comfort in it that Lord Shelford's lacked. Yet such was the case, and the long easy talks on the river were a great refreshment to her spirit.

To Roger's sincere satisfaction his mother and Margaret seemed to be again on the same happy terms as in the old days of the girl's childhood. Occasionally Margaret quoted Lord Shelford in a dogmatic manner, apparently expecting that the great man's opinion would put an end to any discussion ; at such moments Roger saw his mother stiffen, as it were, but he usually succeeded in smoothing difficulties away.

Mr. Scott was also the Bamfields' guest ; he was a delicate and lonely man, and his hostess, with her unerring instinct for comforting those

who suffered, had insisted on his coming to them for part at any rate of his holidays.

It was characteristic of Mrs. Bamfield that she was reticent about Roger's very apparent love for Margaret; her Irish unconventionality never led her into the smallest want of delicate perception; she would not have thought it loyal to discuss her son's feelings with his friend while matters were still in such an early stage. The unrestraint, not to say bad management of the household, was a welcome relief to Margaret after the stately ways she had been used to of late; she had something of the sensation that a child experiences when it revels in the discomforts of a picnic.

The weather was unusually hot for the time of year in England, and sometimes the party went out together in a big clumsy boat after dinner. Sometimes Roger and Margaret spent long hours of the day by themselves in his own dinghy, which he had named after Margaret when she was a solemn little maiden with a long mane of hair and a fringe cut straight across her brow, and he had first gone up to Oxford.

Mr. Scott was doing some writing, and a pipe under a tree seemed to be his best aid to inspiration. Mrs. Bamfield spent much time and energy improving her landlord's garden; she was something of a botanist, and delighted also in wild flowers.

The days passed all too quickly, and more than half of Margaret's time was over when Mrs. Bamfield proposed that they should have an *al fresco* supper

in the cool of the evening some miles up the river where there were some very beautiful woods. It turned out that a good many things had been left behind, and others which most people would have considered necessary had never occurred to Mrs. Bamfield, but it was a merry meal all the same. When it was over, Margaret started to pack up the hamper, but Roger quietly took the work out of her hands. He could not have endured to see her wrestling with piles of dirty plates and knives ; no man was ever more truly chivalrous than he, with his very simple and rather self-effacing manner. He found comfortable seats for the ladies on the roots of the trees, and they leaned back on the trunks enjoying the river breezes. The two men lay at their feet, smoking and talking in perfect idleness ; it was an ideal evening in the first week of September, fresh after the heat of the day, yet still warm.

‘ You must not forget that you have a heavy crew to get home in the tub, Roger,’ said Mr. Scott. ‘ I feel such a log not being able to take an oar.’

‘ I don’t feel the weight,’ answered Roger dreamily ; ‘ none of us want to go fast, I should think.’

‘ Well, of course you always keep fit, and you are pretty strong in a boat. What a disappointment it must have been that you just didn’t row for Oxford.’

Margaret leaned forward eagerly. ‘ Did you row, Roger ? I never knew.’

The man turned and smiled up in her face.

‘ You were such a child then, Margaret ; you had no interest in such things.’

Mrs. Bamfield, mindful that Margaret had loftily announced that Lord Shelford had rowed for his college, was not averse to enlightening her.

‘ Yes ; dear Roger stroked his eight, and he would have rowed for the University if he hadn’t strained a muscle in his shoulder in an accident.’

‘ How did it happen ? ’ inquired Margaret.

‘ Clumsiness,’ said Roger briefly ; but Mrs. Bamfield was not to be put off.

‘ Why, just by Carfax, where the four roads meet, a child ran into the street among all the traffic, slipped and fell. Roger saw a motor almost on it, dashed across and just saved the child, and was knocked over himself. He wasn’t much injured, only enough to spoil his chance of doing what he cared most for.’

There was a note of defiance in the mother’s voice which warned Roger that she was ready to do battle on small provocation. He hastened to avert the fray by changing the subject. But Margaret suddenly said in a voice hearty enough to please even Mrs. Bamfield :

‘ How splendid, Roger, and how like you never to allude to it ! ’ She hoped that her blushes were not seen, but she felt hot at the remembrance of the dictatorial way in which she had spoken of Lord Shelford’s prowess to Roger, no less than at the thought of his simple friendly acceptance of

her remarks, showing no trace of either sarcastic humility or self-assertive enlightenment.

‘How full of scents the air is to-night,’ said Mr. Scott peacefully. ‘Meadowsweet always reminds me of the brook at the foot of our first garden ; my father had had a parish in a big city, and when the change came to a country rectory, we children were almost out of our minds with joy.’

“ ‘Odour and shadow of hour and place,’ ” quoted Roger softly. ‘I wish any one had given us a really good essay on the power of association. Charles Lamb, of course, would have been the ideal person, but Macaulay would have done it well.’

‘Yes, I love his essays,’ said Mrs. Bamfield ; ‘they are so allusive. And, of course, that’s good for one, because one ferrets out what he refers to for fear of being below the level of that preposterously learned school-boy of his.’

Mr. Scott laughed. ‘There’s another essay I should have liked from Charles Lamb ; a discussion as to whether it is the closest bond to like the same things or to dislike them.’

Margaret said eagerly : ‘Oh wouldn’t it have been splendid ! He would have done it to perfection.’

‘Yes,’ said Roger thoughtfully. ‘He was not too perverse and yet perverse enough.’

‘Which do you think, Margaret ? ’ asked Mrs. Bamfield.

‘Dislikes,’ said the girl promptly.

‘And you, Mr. Scott ? ’ she pursued.

‘ Likes,’ he responded with equal brevity.

‘ Now, Roger, it’s your turn.’

‘ I shall try and have it both ways. If one is meeting some one in the hurry of a rough and tumble acquaintance, then common dislikes draw people together the quickest. But for the base of an enduring friendship, I should prefer a similarity of likes.’

‘ A difference of tastes in jokes,’ said his mother, ‘ is one of the most far-reaching troubles in life. You talk of Charles Lamb—now “ Imperfect Sympathies ” expresses my feelings towards two great races. But then I’m Irish.’

‘ You are, dear mother ; it’s noble of you not to hide it, as you so easily could,’ and her son went to prepare the boat, laughing at the threats with which Mrs. Bamfield pursued him.

As Roger slowly pulled the boat home, a silence fell on the little party. Suddenly Margaret said : ‘ Please, Mrs. Bamfield, sing to us.’

‘ Yes, mother, the evening’s meant for it ; look at the sky. Sing melancholy ditties and make us luxuriously sad.’

Mrs. Bamfield laughed. She possessed a sweet and true voice, and an almost inexhaustible memory. And so she sang as she was asked, song after song as her hearers chose in turn, while her son rowed quietly, or rested on his oars.

Presently Margaret began to be aware of something other than the music ; she brought her eyes down from the sky where they were searching

the hidden depths, and she found Roger's gaze fixed on her with burning intensity. Their looks met; they could not see well for the darkness, but they each felt the eyes of the other; and suddenly she recognised the strength of his love. She could not know the passion of tenderness for her which held him in its grip, but she did learn, without possibility of doubt, that he loved her. In the dimness that surrounded them this one thing was plain to both; but to Margaret it brought a shadow of regret. Roger was the best friend in the world; she trusted him, was proud of him, was fond of him, but she could not rearrange her ideas concerning him. He was just what he had always been in her eyes; why, why did he change towards her, instead of remaining the same? She almost dreaded to meet him when the enchanting evening should end and daily life resume its sway; would he be changed? She need not have feared; as Roger handed her out of the boat, she knew that he would make nothing difficult, spoil no friendship while she was his guest. The moment of revelation was past, but the memory remained.

The following day was so wet as to indicate to everyone that, as Mr. Scott said, a field-day with overdue letters was intended. Margaret wrote to her mother; if she could have known how much comfort poor Mrs. Hurst was to derive from the letter, she would have written more guardedly. The mother felt that at last it was her own child

who was speaking, and not, as before, a young woman with whose brilliant career she had nothing in common. She could not know that the magic spell of music and love, of water and sky, was still upon her child, softening the artificial crust with which her training was encasing her.

After luncheon, as the rain showed no signs of abating, Mrs. Bamfield proposed that they should read a play of Shakespeare's, each doubling or trebling parts. But Roger discovered that he had a mysterious job to do in the tool-shed which would take him until tea ; after tea he said he should drag the party out for a walk, as it always cleared for sunset. He went off with a cheerful air ; it was such an escape for him that it was hardly counterfeited. He felt that to have read poetry with Margaret at that moment would have been almost beyond his powers of endurance. For he did not mean to allow his love for her to trouble his lady at present ; she was too young, hardly yet nineteen, to be confronted with a proposal of marriage. His normal healthy outlook on life made him doubt that Lord Shelford was any danger to be reckoned with ; forty-five years was too big a difference in age ; Shelford was too worldly a man for any marriage between him and Margaret to be within the region of practical politics. But this excellent sense on Roger's part did not altogether allay his suspicions ; it was enough to make him determine to hold his hand until her parents' return, but not enough to give him peace of mind.

Certainly it was not enough to give him ease of heart.

As he had predicted, the sun came out after tea, and Roger prepared to fulfil his threat of taking everyone for a walk. Mrs. Bamfield refused, and with so much determination that the other three were forced to set out alone. She had not yet begun to expect them back when she saw Mr. Scott hurrying up the garden with an agitated step. She went to meet him ; to her surprise he drew her into the little den which he and Roger had to themselves.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked his hostess anxiously. ‘Sit down ; you look ill.’

‘It’s enough to make anyone ill,’ groaned Mr. Scott, collapsing into a chair and silence at the same moment.

‘What’s enough for what?’ snapped Mrs. Bamfield impatiently, with more eagerness than grammar.

‘Roger’s being such a hero and such a fool,’ was the answer. ‘First he saves the girl’s life, and then he binds me over to say nothing about it.’

‘But you’ll tell me,’ said the mother firmly. ‘I ought to know.’

‘Of course you ought, but you won’t,’ replied Mr. Scott. ‘The promise binds me to tell no one. He got it out of me when I was faint after my run with the girl ; when she fell I felt sure she’d be trampled to death ; and so afterwards my wretched heart gave out, and Roger made me swear between

sips of brandy, which he administered to me much too strong, that I would keep a still tongue. And this is how I'm doing it,' and the poor little man laughed ruefully.

Mrs. Bamfield was silent for a moment, rapidly putting two and two together, in which occupation she was aided by hearing Margaret, as she and Roger came up the garden, cheerfully call out: 'Tell Roger that Oxfordshire isn't full of mad bulls, Mrs. Bamfield.' The girl's tone had a protective ring in it that struck the older woman at once as out of place.

She glanced kindly at Mr. Scott as she said: 'I won't ask you anything Roger wouldn't like. I suppose he doesn't want Margaret to feel beholden to him, and so he's deceiving her—a bad plan, I think. Which way did you walk?'

'By White's farm, through the little lane by his buildings that leads from his big field to the high road.'

'Ah, yes,' said Mrs. Bamfield, 'a pretty way. Rest a bit now, and we'll say no more about the walk.'

She found Margaret in her bedroom changing her dress.

'Why, what a state your skirt's in,' she exclaimed; 'it's all covered with mud. And what townified shoes—they are soaked through and through.'

'Yes, they are, poor things; that's why I couldn't run and fell down; I oughtn't to have worn them.'

‘ Did you hurt yourself, dear ? ’ asked Mrs. Bamfield, wishing it were a more leading question.

‘ Oh no, there’s no harm done, thank you. It was rather funny. Roger got frightened ; I never saw him like that before.’

Mrs. Bamfield picked up the skirt and hurried away to get it dried ; luckily or unluckily Margaret did not see her face, for the truth would have enlightened the girl and taught her the value of what she did not at present understand. At any rate, it would have insured that her memory of the night before should remain fresh, instead of letting it grow dim.

CHAPTER XIII

ELIZABETH IS LOYAL

MARGARET left London for Mallow on a bright day in early October. As she travelled down she asked herself whether it was really possible that she was the same girl who had started, forlorn and trembling, nine months before, to stay there with perfect strangers. She was looking forward with hungry eagerness to the joy of that special intimacy which existed between Lord Shelford and herself. No man knew better than he how to place things on a personal footing with a woman ; he excelled, as it were, in appropriation, and in the creating of barriers to keep trespassers off his preserves. No girl as finely innocent as Margaret could respond to all the moods in which his nature called to hers, but she was peculiarly sensitive to intellectual companionship and had an unusual capacity for hero-worship ; and, further, she was not awake to certain appeals which might have frightened her had she been aware of them in the mind of her host.

She was met by the great man himself in the

dog-cart. Lord Shelford left the groom to see to the luggage, and the two drove off at a smart pace.

‘ You look white, my dear,’ said he, ‘ country air will do you good. You have not been away from London since you were here last, have you ? ’

‘ Just for a fortnight to the Bamfields,’ said Margaret. ‘ I am not used to a town and I have felt the heat rather badly.’

‘ I should think so, and that tiny house must have been baking hot. How does Lady Saintsbury bear it ? Did you leave her pretty well ? ’

‘ Yes, thanks, and now that people are beginning to come back she will have more change.’

‘ Look, Margaret, you can see the chimneys of the house ; it looks nice among the woods with their autumn colouring. Have you really only been here once ? But of course that’s all, because we weren’t here at Easter ourselves.’

‘ How are the Vincents ? ’ asked Margaret, thus reminded of them.

‘ As well as ever ; they’ll be down here for a shoot presently. By the way, I’ve lots to tell you and to show you too. I’ve got a mare here for you to try, because I want you to get some hunting. She has a mouth like silk and jumps like a deer, but you must try her yourself ; no one else can judge how her paces will suit you.’

The girl turned towards him with an eager gratitude that the man of much experience told himself was more becoming in her than in any of the many women whom he had seen attempt it.

He rightly considered that quality as a touchstone of the worth of the 'female of the species'; Margaret had the happiness of seeing a softer light in his piercing eyes as he smiled at her heart-felt thanks. He was quite aware that his future wife answered promptly to the demands that he made on her; he intended her spirit to come as well through the ordeal as her health had done; he knew, better than anyone else could understand, how trying to her nerves was the imposing of such a personality as his on the heart of a very young girl. He intended during the autumn to tighten the reins with which he held her; partly because he was for ever on the watch to justify to his own mind the wisdom of this marriage, by being himself the disciplinarian and taking a disciple for his wife, partly because he knew that thus he would create occasions on which, without committing himself in the future, he could display to her easily and naturally affection and even tenderness in the present. It was getting well nigh irresistible to Lord Shelford to make the colour flush over Margaret's sweet face, to see the lovely eyes brighten at a word of praise, or cloud over at a look of blame. As he watched her in the cart, in all the dignity of her perfect simplicity, he quoted to himself:

'And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.'

He pulled himself together, and with one of the sudden changes which come easily to people who have great vitality he demanded sharply: 'And

your reading, what of that?' and he kept Margaret telling him what books she had read, and what lessons she had learnt from them, until within a few moments of the house.

Then he said: 'I have chosen another bedroom for you; your first visit was one of state and you were treated accordingly, but now you come as an *habituée*. I have had some photographs of classic pictures and statues put there, and a small book-case with books I have chosen; there are two windows looking different ways, and I told them to stand a big plain writing-table under the one that looks over the woods and the water. No one else will use it, as long as you are likely to want it. Here we are; look at the room before you thank me, because I really took some pains to please my little friend. I know you can't stay with us until we go back to town, but I think you can make Mallow your head-quarters, and just go to your grandmother for a few days sometimes. Short visits are the best for her; they cheer her without tiring her, poor thing.'

There was nothing of the lover about him as he gave her his hand to help her to spring to the ground, yet few people who looked at him standing, smiling and erect, beside the cart could have doubted his ability to play the part, nor failed to see that he was likely to cut out rival actors.

And then began a time that Margaret used afterwards to look back upon with peculiar affection. At the actual moment she preferred the season

in Bryanston Square, but in after days the memories of Mallow took the first place. And the predominant figure alike at the time and in her remembrance was Thomes Shelford. Not the least successful of that remarkable man's ways was the absolutely natural manner in which this was achieved. Lord Shelford was never overpowering, never touched being self-assertive; but his constitution, both of body and mind, gave him an easy mastery that somehow was seldom questioned. His was a triumphant personality, and the spectacle was attractive enough for most of the world to yield to its charm; and it was scarcely wonderful that a young girl, distinguished by more notice than the great man had given for many years to one woman, should count herself a worshipper. People and places both showed him to advantage; his enjoyment added to that of his companions. They went occasional expeditions in the car; Lord Shelford never encouraged motoring merely for its own sake. He took his daughter and their guests to visit famous scenes and buildings, where his knowledge of history and architecture added to their enjoyment. Or they went to houses where they were welcomed by men who bore important parts in different fields of activity, and where, however varied were the interests of his hosts, Lord Shelford was at home in their company.

Circumstances often combined to bring about Lord Shelford's supremacy, yet it was difficult to trace how the occasions for its demonstration

arose. Once or twice the great man was at a loss. Margaret noted a particular occasion on which he and she were placed in the wrong. The manner of it was in this wise.

Lord Shelford had arranged that when Lord Middlesex came down he should be offered the best shooting that the place afforded. Several other guns were there, and good sport resulted from the first day's work. In the evening the party gathered round the big log fire at one end of the billiard room. Charles Waters turned to Elizabeth and told her not to go into a particular field where a bull of uncertain temper had been turned loose for a time.

Lord Shelford laughed. 'You might have an amusing experience like Margaret had. Do you think that Charles would be as heroic for you as young Bamfield was for her?'

Lord Middlesex strolled to the fire.

'What was your adventure, Miss Margaret? May we hear?'

The girl looked instinctively at Lord Shelford.

'Yes, let's have it, Margaret. A heroic encounter with imaginary danger is always amusing.'

'Well,' said the girl, 'Mr. Bamfield took Mr. Scott and me a walk through some fields that ended in a farm-yard with the high road beyond. The last field was very large and irregularly shaped; the short end of the farm buildings came nearly to the hedge; the field ended there, and you came to the road by a narrow lane, just wide enough to

allow of a five-barred gate and a big stile abutting on the highway. The farm-yard wall was very high, and so was the quick-set hedge ; the lane was a *cul-de-sac* unless the gate was opened.'

'Stop a minute, please, Miss Margaret,' said Lord Middlesex. 'How long was this lane which formed, as you say, the way between the field and the road, with a wall and a hedge on either side of it ? Can you remember ? '

'About half the length of Bryanston Square, or a little less, I should think,' replied the girl.

'And could a cart and horse turn in its width ? ' pursued her questioner.

'I think not,' she answered, 'because big wagons couldn't pass each other ; we heard that afterwards. Well, we noticed a herd of beasts as we walked down the footpath beside the hedge on our way to the road ; they were up in the corner furthest from the lane into which our little path was leading us. We observed that where the grass of the field ended, and this cart-track began, the way looked muddy and slippery ; there had been some very heavy rain in the night. Just then we saw that the farmer and his dog, who were getting the beasts into a compact mass to drive them into the next field, were being much impeded by the shouts and antics of some little boys who had volunteered their help. The beasts got restless ; there was a lot of head tossing and tail raising, which seemed as vigorous as the cap-waving of the boys. Suddenly, just as we reached the wall of the farm-yard and

began to try and pick our way over the wet and uneven cart-track, we saw that the whole lot were stampeding towards us. Probably the boys thought that the gate near us, instead of the opposite one, was the intended exit; anyhow half a hundred maddened creatures seemed to me to be upon us. I had just time to be ashamed of my fears when suddenly the quiet and sedate Roger Bamfield appeared to go mad; he yelled to Mr. Scott to run with me to the gate, but not to stop and open it but to get me over the stile. Well, I couldn't run very fast—the men had both said earlier that I had come out in unworkmanlike shoes—so Mr. Scott grabbed my arm and tried to help me. Roger continued making awful noises, and in looking back I slipped and fell. But before I went down I saw him standing in the lane apparently fencing with the foremost beast. He kept rapping it on the nose, and as it backed towards the field he backed towards the gate; it was too funny for words. Then the bull got pressed behind by the others and came forward; *même jeu* by Roger Bamfield with the stick. I looked back because all the time he was shouting in a most excited way; he seemed quite to have lost his head.'

'Ah,' said Lord Middlesex, still standing by the fire, as he lit another cigarette, 'and can you tell us anything of the animals—were they as rampageous as the man?'

'Yes, they were pawing and stamping and bellowing, and the back ones falling over one another, but above all the noise Roger kept howling,

“Get her over the stile.” Well, by this time, Roger was quite close to us and the beasts seemed to make a rush, and then I saw no more till Mr. Scott hauled me over the stile. Then I looked back and saw Roger make one more onslaught, and then turn his back on the herd for the first time and run like a hare to the stile and vault over it. The beasts arrived with a rush, and Roger dragged us across the road and through a gate into a field opposite, but neither the stile nor the gate gave way; and presently the farmer and his dog came down the high road and began to drive the beasts quietly back, heading them up the lane and going over the stile and up into the field after them. And then came the bathos. There wasn’t a bull among them; they were all quite peaceable animals being fattened for the fair, with nothing savage in their innocent minds.’

Lord Shelford’s laugh was rather noticeably loud; then he said: ‘Well, it is always tempting to get kudos cheap, but I suppose that Bamfield thought one was likely to find savage bulls in a herd. Quite a natural mistake for a London Civil servant.’

‘Nonsense, Shelford,’ said Lord Middlesex with unwonted sharpness; ‘however little Miss Margaret may understand, you ought to know that Bamfield saved her from being trampled to death. Of course he and the other man would have had no difficulty without her, because they could run. What a moment for Bamfield when

she fell down ! That story's a fine example of quick brains and resolute courage, Miss Margaret.'

The girl looked bewildered. 'But I feel sure he lost his head, he shouted so.'

Lord Middlesex smiled, but not very pleasantly. 'He could only hit one beast all the time ; he shouted to scare the others. Did he spend much breath as he ran to the stile himself after you got over ? '

'Well, no,' said Margaret, 'now you mention it, he didn't.'

'Did you and he talk much of it afterwards ? ' asked Lord Middlesex in the same level voice.

Lord Shelford interrupted. 'Of course, he wouldn't be too anxious to allude to it ; probably there was never any danger.'

Lord Middlesex did not speak, but he continued to look inquiringly at Margaret.

'No, we didn't,' said the girl ; 'Mr. Scott was upset after—he has a weak heart—and we had to get him brandy at the farmhouse, and Roger talked to the farmer apart, and then we all hurried home to rest. Next time we walked there, we saw a new gate, just where the wall and the hedge formed the beginning of the lane.'

'Yes,' said Lord Middlesex, 'I foresaw that consequence. Well, Miss Margaret, Roger Bamfield saved your life, and didn't let you know it—that's all. Will you give me a game of billiards, Shelford ? '

But Lord Shelford proposed bridge with three of the other men, and Charles Waters, who knew

that in the country he missed his game at the Club, took on Lord Middlesex in the host's place, and accepted signal defeat in his usual pleasant manner.

Margaret's whole world was in a whirl, and she was not sorry when the time came for her to go upstairs. To do her justice, she made ample if tardy reparation to Roger in her thoughts. But then, as he did not know it, that reparation was of no use to him.

Margaret at this time began to feel more interest in Charles Waters ; she noticed how useful he was both to Lord Shelford and to Elizabeth. Waters had a genuine and generous admiration for his benefactor that was a passport to Margaret's good graces.

As the year wore on, some little dances were got up in the neighbourhood, and the man and the girl made the pleasing discovery that their steps exactly suited. They had suspected this in London, and indeed both were dancers far above the average ; as they valed more together, their steps became still more suited until they both cared more to dance with each other than with anyone else. This was apparent to Lord Shelford when Elizabeth gave a dance at Mallow on the night before the Hunt ball. Lord Shelford's observant eyes took in the perfect enjoyment of the motion which the two betrayed as they danced ; what he did not realise was that he himself, his virtues and his abilities, was the subject of their talk in the intervals. Margaret did not know many men,

and Waters was slacker than usual in performing the offices of henchman to Elizabeth. He neither introduced people as assiduously as heretofore, nor danced with so many guests himself. Lord Shelford counted that he had six vales with Margaret ; then the great man found time to speak a word in his daughter's ear. Elizabeth's answer seemed to reassure him ; he found a youth to take Margaret into supper, and told off Charles with the mistress of a neighbouring place.

The chief lady thought, as she drove home in her car, that the neighbourhood would be poor indeed without Lord Shelford. How brilliant he had been at supper ! And how pleasant it was to be with a man who, while he attended to all his guests, showed peculiar honour to only one. Certainly, in point of appearance he cut out all the younger men, and how remarkably well he looked in pink !

But Margaret would have thought the lady's admiration weak compared to her own feelings for him. At the end of the dance the great room was almost empty ; Lord Shelford bade the band play ' The Blue Danube ' and end with the ' John Peel ' galop. As the familiar notes struck up, Waters started towards Margaret, but another step was quicker. The girl felt an arm clasping her which she had never felt before, yet she knew instinctively that it was her host's. He spoke no word of invitation, but he took possession of her ; she yielded to him with a dim delicious abandonment, she

closed her eyes, she floated where he guided, her spirit obeyed him as unfalteringly as her feet. Suddenly music and measure changed, and she found herself caught in a triumphant whirl of joy until all too quickly the strains died wistfully away. Lord Shelford kept his arm around her for a moment as she stood dazed and breathless by his side ; he looked down at her flushed face and shining eyes ; he saw the simple folds of the soft white gown rise and fall over her quickly beating heart. He raised his head and his eyes met his daughter's. Elizabeth Shelford came towards them, and as she came she smiled upon her father and the girl with simple and unselfish love.

‘ I wanted to say how much I enjoyed seeing you two dance together,’ said the daughter.

‘ Thank you, Elizabeth,’ said the father ; ‘ you are a good friend.’

As he stood at the foot of the broad shallow stairs, saying good-night to the ladies of the house-party as they went up, he laid his hand on his daughter's arm and kept her behind for a moment.

‘ No man could be more loyal than you are, Elizabeth ; I am proud of you and grateful to you. Do not think that I take your service for granted.’

On the following night at the Hunt ball Margaret again wore white. Lord Shelford thought it suited her best, as indeed it did, and he had made his preference known to her with the results that, as he expected, she tried to please him by wearing it as often as possible. This time the dress was

not so youthful ; it was made of a heavier fabric shot with silver, and Lord Shelford missed the almost childish look of the night before, though he owned to himself that the girl was at her best. Somehow her pleasure in the ball was inferior to her joy at the dance the night before ; Charles Waters danced divinely, music and floor were perfect, but Lord Shelford did not approach her. She hoped until the end that he would ask her ; she did not realise that that one perfect dance with him was alike her first and her last. He knew that it was unsuitable for him to be her partner except on the one occasion of which he took advantage ; that once the chance of entering into her pleasure on equal terms with men of her own age came suddenly in his way, and he made the most of it. But it meant more to the girl than to the man, as it generally does, and so Margaret felt the incompleteness of the Hunt ball as she would not have done had it not been for that one dance.

The next day was the big meet, and a large party turned out from Mallow. Elizabeth rode remarkably well, and Charles Waters was a finished horseman. Margaret promised to be as good as she looked on a horse ; she could sit anything and feared nothing, but Elizabeth felt that she would not learn judgment in horsemanship while Lord Shelford insisted on piloting her himself. He was not prone to deal in fictitious values, but he certainly understood less of riding and of horses than he would ever own to himself. Yet, as usual, he looked

attractive on horseback, and he knew no fear and kept his usual gallant bearing. Margaret followed his lead ; his look back to see how she negotiated the fence he had just jumped never failed to touch her. She was admirably mounted, and she and her mare did each other justice. She did not take her good luck for granted ; she knew that, normally, hunting would not have been for her, and her gratitude to her host was proportionate. He worked her hard at her Latin, and she responded well ; she had a natural literary appreciation that helped her greatly in her rendering of classic authors.

Lord Shelford was a first-rate shot, but Margaret never saw him exercise his powers in that direction. No ladies at Mallow ever walked with the guns ; the great man was old-fashioned in his home, and considered it unwomanly for the fair sex to assist at the slaughter of birds ; he was also greatly averse himself to female companionship on those occasions.

Margaret used often to go up to her grandmother for the day, taking her Latin to prepare in the train, and even doing it at Eaton Terrace. She endeavoured to absent herself from Mallow on days when a shoot was taking place ; of the hunting she missed as little as she could. The stud-groom, Stokes, took a pride in the pretty, friendly girl, and her mare kept well up to a good deal of hard work during the season. Charles Waters was a considerable asset to the ladies. Margaret was too inexperienced to see that he was satisfied with

a position which a stronger man would not have thought sufficient ; she only observed his pleasant manners, and admired the good-natured way in which he filled up gaps. If the conversation flagged with awkward guests, Charles helped out the situation ; if plans were difficult to make, Charles was ready to undertake to find out other people's wishes and to sacrifice himself. He helped Elizabeth with alterations in the gardens, devoting much time to her tastes and interests. He was ready to assist Margaret in the preparing of her Latin for her master, but the great man put a stop to that almost before it had begun. Yet it was on his behalf that Charles was most anxious to be a profitable servant, and it was this that prejudiced Margaret in his favour, while it grew to be something akin to an irritation to Lord Shelford himself. For the man who took things so lightly and easily began to feel, with some surprise, that he was allowing a consciousness of annoyance to enter into his life, and, although he had himself under perfect control, he did not like the strain.

Margaret felt that more study was expected of her, and she gladly obeyed by doing, under his direction, a course of reading in addition to her Latin. She had little time for thought ; her work and her play filled her life. And so in a wonderful round of interests the days sped on, and the time drew near for Margaret's return for Christmas ; she had promised her grandmother to be there in time to do all her shopping for her, and to help her

with her gifts. Lord Shelford was loth to part with her, but he knew that the contrast would work in his favour, and that the humble loneliness of Eaton Terrace would not soften her regrets for Mallow, nor make her look forward less longingly to Bryanston Square. He was old and could endure to wait ; Margaret's youthful eagerness served him in two ways ; it made her impatient to return to his home, and it aided the quality of her devotion for him, always keener than his for her.

CHAPTER XIV

ANOTHER BUNCH OF FLOWERS

MARGARET came up to London in the middle of December, determined so to spend Christmas and New Year with her grandmother that she and Lady Saintsbury should be drawn closer together. She found a warmer welcome awaiting her than she had ever yet received ; she felt cheered by it, for she had not expected it, and as always her heart was sore at the parting from Lord Shelford. She knew that it would not be for long, that five or six weeks would soon pass ; but she had got so much accustomed to taking her cue, as it were, from him, to living in his atmosphere, that she felt almost adrift when he was not there to direct her. She plunged into Christmas preparations for her grandmother and herself ; Lady Saintsbury was struck by the improvement in general capacity that the girl evinced. But every now and then Margaret caught her grandmother's eyes fixed on her with a questioning, almost a wistful gaze, and then she would turn quickly away to avoid it. She did not know that Lady Victoria Vincent had been to see Lady

Saintsbury, and that her call had not tended to allay the old lady's increasing anxieties.

When Margaret came in one evening, she was told that Mr. Bamfield was waiting to see her in the dining-room. Something struck her as unusual in the form of words ; she almost threw down her armful of parcels in the tiny hall, and hastened into the room.

' Roger, is anything the matter ? Your mother ill, or Grannie ? '

' Nothing's the matter, Margaret,' was the reply ; ' I have just been with your grandmother.' He paused, and something tense in the quiet manner warned the girl of what was coming. He drew a chair to the little hearth for her, and sat down near her himself.

' I have her permission to ask you a question, Margaret, but first I want you to know two things.' He hesitated again, but somehow it did not seem that he had difficulty in speaking, rather that he was anxious not to say too much. ' Please realise that whatever your answer may be, it will make no difference to my feeling for you, nor to my hopes for the future.' Again he paused, and then he rose and stood before her, and his words came like a flood. His eyes blazed and he spoke quickly and clearly ; the quiet manner was gone.

' Margaret, I love you ; I think that I have always loved you ; I know that I shall always love you. To me you are the sweetest thing on earth ; the noblest thoughts of great men

are but a setting for your image in my heart. I revere you with all my soul, I long for you with all my being. I ask for sanction to be your husband, but if that is denied me, I know that I shall be no less your most devoted servant while breath is in me. Margaret, Margaret, you cannot cast me off ; my love is part of me, not a glove to take off and on at will ; even you cannot come between us, because my love for you is beyond the region where desire demands fulfilment. Do not think that I shall trouble you ; only remember that I am as much yours as the air you breathe—that my life is at your feet ; and know that my service is your due, whether you can give me the guerdon that I ask, or whether I must only keep what I have taken, the image of the woman I adore.'

For some moments there was silence in the little room, while Margaret sat bewildered, and Roger stood, now very still, with his elbows on the chimney-piece, and his head bowed in his hands. Then again he spoke, haltingly almost, and very gently :

' Dear, don't think of me sadly ; even if you give me pain, it is a better gift than joy from anyone else ; nothing is worth having that doesn't cost the full price.'

' Oh, Roger, I am so sorry,' said Margaret ; ' I am so fond of you, but I can't care for you as you want me to.' The tears were in her eyes.

The man straightened himself, and smiled down at her bravely.

‘Don’t be sad, Margaret ; you have given me infinitely much, and your gift you cannot take away.’

‘Why, I’ve only made you unhappy ; it would have been far, far better that we had never known one another than that I should take your love and give nothing in return.’

‘I told you that other men’s thoughts centre round you in my mind and heart, Margaret. Take these words from me to you, if you will.

“Who thought upon reward ? And yet how much
Comes after !—oh, what amplest recompense !
Is the knowledge of her, naught ? the memory, naught ?
Lady, should such an one have looked on you,
Ne’er wrong yourself as far as quote the world
And say, love can go unrequited here !”

And now good-bye, my lady and my love.’

Roger was gone, and Margaret sat long by the fire, thinking of him and of his words. It was the first offer she had had, and as such she told herself that it was natural that she should be touched by it ; she did not know that it was exceedingly unlikely that she would ever again be the recipient of devotion of such a quality. But she did try, in a confused and halting way, to straighten out her own emotions, and she found to her great surprise that her paramount feeling was one of pride that Roger should have said such words to her. She had always taken him for granted, even before she had been dazzled by the attraction of Lord Shelford, and now it came as a great surprise to her

that she should feel such humble gratitude for his love. Soon afterwards came the recollection of Lord Middlesex's version of Roger and the stampeding cattle, and she regretted that she had not confessed her indebtedness. Should she write a little note thanking him for everything and begging him to stay her friend? At the bottom of her heart she knew that from his point of view such words were unnecessary, but she wanted to say them for her own sake. And so before she rejoined Lady Saintsbury, she wrote and posted her little letter.

'MY DEAR ROGER,—I don't feel that I have thanked you as I should like for the great honour you have done me, nor even said how deeply I value your friendship, nor how much I hope that I shall always keep it. You think so much too well of me, but believe that after to-day I will, at any rate, try to be more worthy of your good opinion, although I must not accept your love. And please let me say that I know now what you tried to keep from me at Shillingford, and that I realise that you risked your life for mine. In every way I am in your debt, and must ever remain so, but at least I can say, Thank you.

'Yours as always,

'MARGARET HURST.'

The following day a sheaf of lilies was left at the door. Pinned to the paper was a little envelope addressed to Miss Hurst. Inside was a plain card and on it was written in Roger's hand, 'From him

who receives to her who gives, with unchanging devotion.'

Lady Saintsbury sighed as she saw the flowers ; Margaret had already told her of Roger's proposal and her own refusal, and the old lady did not know whether to be glad or sorry. She wrote a little note to Elizabeth Shelford, asking for a call from her if she happened to be up for shopping before Christmas. Two or three days later Elizabeth wrote that she would call that very afternoon, and Lady Saintsbury hurriedly arranged on the telephone that Margaret should go to Mrs. Durant. Both Mrs. Bamfield and her daughter had called at Eaton Terrace ; rather obviously they wished to show that what Roger had told them of his interview with Margaret had made no change in their regard for the girl, and Irene sent a warm welcome to her friend.

When Elizabeth Shelford arrived, Lady Saintsbury went direct to the point.

' My dear, I am so much troubled about Margaret ; Roger Bamfield has made her an offer of marriage, and she has refused him, and doesn't seem able to give an adequate reason. What do you make of it ? '

Elizabeth answered lightly : ' Well, you know, the child's too young, barely nineteen ; she has life before her and had better not hurry. Besides, he's not a very good match, is he ? '

Lady Saintsbury looked her visitor straight in the face.

‘ Roger Bamfield is so entirely the man that Margaret’s parents would like for her husband, that I should not feel at all justified in discouraging him if Margaret cared for him. His circumstances are not brilliant, but they are adequate and certain, and he is so highly spoken of at the Treasury that he is pretty sure to do well.’

Elizabeth had solicited permission from her father to tell Lady Saintsbury so much of his intentions with regard to Margaret as would be required to keep her content to wait. But she did not wish to use her reserves if she could help it. Again her voice was unconcerned as she said : ‘ It’s her first offer, isn’t it ? Why do you give it a thought ? She is certain to have plenty more.’

‘ Not if her mind is filled with one image to the exclusion of all others,’ answered Lady Saintsbury. ‘ Roger has been devoted to her for years, and knew her as a child ; if this hadn’t been the case he would hardly have got near enough to her to learn to love her.’

‘ Well,’ said Elizabeth, ‘ it’s easier to hinder than to help. Young people are apt to know their own affairs best, and older ones should leave them to themselves.’

‘ Yes, but do they ? ’ asked the older woman quickly ; and the younger one saw that the time for fencing was gone by.

‘ My father was so much struck with her at Mallow nearly a year ago that he took a great

interest in her. Since then it has ripened into something more.'

Elizabeth paused, and Lady Saintsbury said with an effort to suppress her eagerness :

' You know that I am more than grateful to you both.'

Miss Shelford continued almost as though the other had not spoken :

' But you will understand—no one better—that in his peculiar circumstances of age and position any young girl would require special training if he proposed to make her his wife.'

Again a pause ; Lady Saintsbury did not break it, and the other went on slowly :

' I think I may say that Margaret has responded to my father's demands with wonderful success. I know them to be deeply attached to each other, and I think that, if he asks her, as I believe he will, and if she gives herself to him, as I make no doubt of her doing, they will be very happy.'

Elizabeth rose to go, but added, as though it were an after-thought, a word or two to her hostess :

' You know, of course, that in point of this world's goods Margaret would be richly endowed, though naturally that would never enter the child's mind. I must be going, dear Lady Saintsbury, and I wish you both all good things. When we come back to Bryanston Square, we shall make Margaret happier than ever, I hope. But I don't

think father wants to hurry her ; the best preparation for a life with him would be some apprenticeship first, especially if—as in this case—it is gladly undertaken. You don't look well, try and trust the future.'

' I will try, but I don't sleep well. Dr. Brown has been quite worried about me lately.'

Elizabeth sighed, but she said no more.

When she had kissed and left her hostess, the older woman lay very still in deep and earnest thought. She envied—ah ! how deeply she envied—her grandchild to whom this wonderful future was to be offered. She had come under the magic of Lord Shelford's spell ; she knew the value of what he had to offer. But she saw things that Elizabeth Shelford's eyes were blind to ; she herself had been a wife, and was the mother of children ; she knew that Margaret must forgo all idea of equal mating with her like. She would be the grateful wife of a man old enough to be her grandfather ; would she love him enough to justify it ? There could be only one answer to Lady Saintsbury's mind ; she was alike unable and unwilling to separate and classify values ; she simply meant that Margaret should be Lord Shelford's wife. That would have been enough for her, it was many times more than enough for her grandchild. Lady Saintsbury's mind was at rest for the girl's future ; she even felt equal for any objections the Hursts might raise. Mary was sure to get some high-flown, tiresome ideas, and stick to them obstinately ; but

she would stand up for the child. There was no reason that because Mary had made a bad marriage her daughter should do likewise—quite the reverse.

When Margaret returned, she found a very loving, placid grandmother, and the two had a happy evening. The child was just told that Elizabeth had called and left her love; she had no suspicions that she or her future had been the object of the visit.

Margaret thought much during this time of the corresponding winter days last year; she remembered so vividly her sensations of grief when her mother's home-coming was delayed. Sometimes she wondered whether her mother and she would take up the threads as easily as they had done before; but her mind always shied away, as it were, from the prospect. At any rate, she told herself her mother would rejoice that she and her grandmother were having such companionship together; never before had the two found life so pleasant and so easy.

Roger called once again, but Margaret was out, and Lady Saintsbury seemed to have nothing to say about him or his visit. He sent to her at Christmas an exquisitely bound edition of Browning; in 'Colombe's Birthday' he had put a mark in pencil at the words that he had quoted, hoping that she would understand that they spoke still for him, but Margaret never found them. His delicacy was indeed too great for such a situation;

his lady was rapidly losing the power of appreciating what did not either make a direct appeal, or what was not capable of being weighed by the standards of the outside world. When she was with him, she could feel again something of the old trustful comfort of his presence, but Mallow had obliterated from her mind the finer shades of character that Shillingford had offered to her view.

Elizabeth sent her a pretty bangle, and Lord Shelford's gift was a handsomely fitted suit case. He had wished, with a curious pertinacity which he sometimes showed about the spending of money, to give her now the present that he considered suitable to his wife. A truly wonderful article, made of the finest leather, and gorgeously fitted with gold and tortoiseshell, came to Mallow for Elizabeth's approval; she had difficulty in pointing out to him how unsuitable it was for Margaret at the moment. Even when he was persuaded that a plainer one would still be useful to Lady Shelford for foreign travel, when the more elaborate affair was left at home, he refused to have her initials put on it.

'They can be engraved later just as well,' he said, 'and it will save the expense of doing it twice over.'

Yet he was not sure whether it was really the question of a few shillings that weighed with him, or whether it was the desire to put a particular sentence in his letter. Anyhow the

words were written to Margaret, and she read as follows :

‘ I have not had any initials put on the case or the fittings ; you will be marrying one of these days—at least, I hope you will—and then, if I may, I will repair the negligence.’

CHAPTER XV

ELIZABETH WARNS HER FATHER

MARGARET herself felt a vague sense of disquietude at her own exultation in returning to Bryanston Square at the end of January.

Lord Shelford thought it wise this time to be out when she arrived, but even that could not keep her from almost dancing with joy when she reached the room next to Elizabeth's on the third floor. Unconsciously, she avoided as much as possible facing the future or thinking out her own position ; she looked forward no further than the season ; she felt that this summer would be even more delightful than last year's. If she thought of her parents' return in the winter, for the two years' extension would be over by Christmas, it was with a sinking heart, though she would not have acknowledged it even to herself. She was as little ready to look back. Roger's proposal was a painful thought ; she felt angry with him for disturbing their happy relations. If she had been more experienced she would have known how deep her feeling for him was, though at present it seemed

made up chiefly of pity and respect, with a certain amount of resentment. When she remembered her life at school—dear as it had been—the books she had loved then, and the studies that had captivated her seemed almost to reproach her now. She told herself that she would devote her time to Latin; it was better to concentrate on one subject for a while than to divide one's energies by doing a little in several directions. But if she had been quite honest with herself she would have realised that she was working hard at Latin because she read it with Lord Shelford. At school she had read history far more eagerly than anything else, and she had given every spare moment to drawing; now she seemed only to care for the 'Æneid,' which was what they had begun to read at Mallow.

When Lord Shelford met her in the drawing-room before dinner, the radiance of her face made her look as lovely as ever her mother did. The quartette were to have a quiet evening at home, and as Lord Shelford gave his arm to Margaret when dinner was announced, the girl trod upon air, and life indeed seemed very good.

The next morning Margaret brought her Virgil to Lord Shelford, and they started on the second book, perhaps the most attractive part to a girl of Margaret's age. She used to prepare a given quantity by herself, so as to cover more ground with her teacher.

No girl could have two lovers more dissimilar than Roger Bamfield and Lord Shelford. The

one seemed bent upon doing himself less than justice, while the other never failed to make the most of himself. The scrupulous delicacy with which Roger shrank from even the appearance of making any claim upon Margaret really served his cause badly. In sober truth he had saved her life that day in August, but because he loved her he belittled his act. She was as prone as most girls to take men at their own valuation ; gradually, as the shock faded from her mind, she remembered the success of the rescue more vividly than the danger of the attempt, so that the heroic act lost much of its value.

For all this Roger himself was partly to blame ; the bent of his character was to the negative side, and he needed the sunshine of happiness to correct it. His adoration of Margaret resembled that which knights offered to their ladies in the days of chivalry ; but Margaret was exposed to the glamour of temptations which Roger discounted without understanding. Although he felt that nothing he was or had was good enough for his beloved, his humility unconsciously exacted from her a higher standard than the girl could yet reach.

He never thought that the atmosphere she breathed in Bryanston Square was likely to influence her. This was chiefly because he himself had an unerring instinct of discernment between the real and the sham, a fastidious aloofness from the tyranny of accidental circumstances. And as he put

Margaret so much above himself, so much the more did he feel certain she would also be untouched by the gaudy side of life.

But he ought to have realised that, though Margaret's nature was both sweet and strong, yet she was very young, and could hardly lead a life in such sudden contrast to her old insignificance without somewhat deteriorating, at any rate for a time. He felt sad at heart and stood aside; his anxiety not to use their old friendship as a cloak for his attentions made Margaret feel that he was taking his refusal badly. Roger, in short, was of that too rare type of man, the diffident lover, who, when a woman has the instinct to give herself into his keeping, turns into the best husband on earth.

Lord Shelford had no scruples as to the use of his advantages. The due value of wealth was put before Margaret constantly, though unobtrusively. But certain things that no money could buy were what were most insisted on in Bryanston Square; Margaret began to feel that a life in which success and power had no part would not be worth the living.

Shelford saw that one of his biggest holds on Margaret was through his influence on her mind. To this end, the Virgil readings approached really careful study, and he allowed nothing to prevent them. He was in touch with modern Oxford scholarship, and once or twice he wrote to an authority there concerning disputed passages.

What girl could fail to feel the flattery of it all, more especially one who before had been so supremely unimportant ?

There is no incense so overpowering as that which an elderly man of distinction burns before a young girl. And the very disparity of years gives him advantages which are by no means to be despised. Lord Shelford's behaviour to Margaret was an excellent example of this ; he mingled courtly deference with affectionate familiarity in a perfectly easy and natural manner.

When he attended to her wishes and opinions in the presence of others, she could not fail to feel proud. He was far too much of a man to show off her submission before anyone, but he intended that submission to be an actual fact, and he meant from the first to have no mistake about it. He had seen fond and foolish old men made laughing stocks by young women whom they had married late in life. If Margaret needed a little private breaking-in, Lord Shelford would enjoy the process ; but he did not tyrannise aimlessly. It was necessary to his whole scheme that he should be the master, in no other way could he justify this marriage to himself. He was genuinely pleased with the success of his venture as far as it had yet gone, and he had no doubt that if he wished he could pursue it as successfully to the end. He had never had much difficulty in attracting women ; he was fortunate in having the kind of good looks that especially appeals to them ; he was sure that

Margaret would not ask better than to love him if he gave her the opportunity.

She was indeed deeply attached to him, and Lord Shelford had achieved all that he wished so far ; he had shown Margaret many men and many scenes, and he had remained the dominant figure throughout. It was quite palpable that he was her hero. Among the advantages that age gives a man in dealing with a woman was one which Lord Shelford did not fail to use. He knew the value of a sharp word in due season, and he made Margaret attend to her reading with him as she had done for none of her teachers. The great man who deferred to her at his dinner-table made her know her place in his study. And, of course, she admired him the more, and he felt his influence the stronger. When he scolded her, he did it thoroughly, and she winced both at the time and after.

On one occasion, after many gaieties the previous day, he found her ill-prepared and inattentive. Lord Shelford rated her so soundly, that it took all her mettle to get through to the end of the lesson. When they met at luncheon, an hour or so after, he saw that her eyes were red. He talked so easily, and seemed so unconcerned, that the girl hoped that he had noticed nothing. But as he walked down to the House he smiled, well-pleased ; he was not averse to giving Margaret a little wholesome pain, he knew that his occasional sternness made her appreciate his affection the more. And

the disparity of their years gave him many opportunities of showing her a chivalrous tenderness that was exquisite in itself, and irresistible to Margaret. His praise was nectar to her, and Lord Shelford knew it ; but he also knew that at this moment of her life she cared for his blame more than for the approval of any other man.

He was glad to see that her fine health stood her in good stead ; he was aware that his methods put a considerable strain on a girl, and although he allowed, and almost welcomed, nerves in a woman as making her a more responsive companion, he did not like her to be inconveniently affected by them.

Margaret was treading paths that were difficult for any one, and especially so for a lonely girl who had been more than usually sheltered. But they were perilously pleasant and attractive.

The riding every morning had become so natural that Margaret wondered what she would do without it. Charles was often with them ; a room behind Lord Shelford's on the second floor was kept for him, and Elizabeth noticed that he occupied it more than usual.

It was quite a gay quartette that started out on the winter mornings, though the day's tardy awakening had not the charm of the exquisite early mornings in the summer. It was significant of Margaret's state of mind that she hardly noticed the absence of the friends with whom they often rode in the season, except to rejoice that she had Lord Shelford more to herself. If she ever had a

wish unfulfilled when she was with her friends, it was for a little more dancing. The remembrance of the few balls she had been to in the season, with Waters always in attendance whether she and Elizabeth went alone or with a party, and still more the recollections of Hunt balls and the dance at Mallow, became positively tantalising. She was sure Mr. Waters was the best dancer in the world, and her step agreed so perfectly with his that valsing became an exquisite emotion. She was so eager and natural in her pleasures, so young and vigorous, that she betrayed plainly her preference for dancing rather than for sitting-out.

She had shown no inclination for flirtation as yet, nor had Lord Shelford any idea of letting her form a habit which was not in his scheme for her. She still preferred her riding to her dancing, but her host's keen eyes had watched her, especially with Charles, at the country balls, and he knew that she was more set than he wished on a pastime which he could not share. He had been in his day so admirable a partner that he understood fully the attraction of dancing, and had forgotten none of the moves of the game. So it was with a bad grace that he acquiesced, when Elizabeth pointed out that she wished to take a party to a dance at the Grafton Galleries.

‘The child's always tired out next day, I don't like to see her listless and pale,’ objected Lord Shelford.

‘But father, there are so many young people who

have been nice to Margaret, we must give them some pleasures in return. She ought to make nice girl friends. I want her to see plenty of them this season ; and we can't only accept things, we must give too and pay our debts.'

' Well, as long as she isn't with a set that paints and powders. No make-up, mind,' said Lord Shelford. ' And what about the men ? ' he asked.

' There's Charles,' began Elizabeth, when her father's remark : ' I was not forgetting him,' interrupted her. She went on : ' And he will bring over one or two men ; and there's the younger Vincent nephew and two or three others we know. I can give you a list, if you like.'

' No, don't trouble, and do as you like. I suppose you'll have them to dinner first ? '

' Oh yes, I must do that. Shall you be here ? '

Lord Shelford paused. ' I'll let you know that later,' he said. ' I must go out now.'

Lord Shelford's calculations served him as well as his recklessness ; one of his charms was the apparently unconscious way in which he showed his different moods. But there was, as a matter of fact, very little really involuntary about him. Just now he debated whether he should have a few friends himself and go to a play with them on the same evening as the ball ; he could mix the two parties at dinner, and it would be easy to distress Margaret by his inevitable neglect of her. His necessary attentions to others could be made marked enough to attract her notice. He was

aware that many times already she had felt a pang when, as constantly happened in society, their different positions kept them apart, and she saw him enjoying himself with others as he did with her, and know that she could not match his indifference. He considered it salutary that she should sometimes feel jealous of other women, cleverer, handsomer, more highly placed than herself; but her attachment to him was so obvious, she turned so eagerly to receive his notice and was so innocently anxious to please him, that very little of this punishment was necessary.

If he had thought it expedient he would have had no scruple in sending her to the ball with its enjoyment spoilt beforehand, but just now he did not judge it worth while. He meant to marry her, and to marry her before she was spoilt. He saw her admiration and felt her devotion; he meant to continue his attitude of independence towards her, but he meant her to be utterly responsive to him. He was practically certain that she would not refuse him, but that was one of the risks, however small, that he did not mean to run.

Fond as he was of Margaret, neither she nor any other woman should give him a rebuff. She should be fully committed to him before he committed himself to her, before he gave her all the tenderness that he knew she was longing to receive as much as he desired to bestow it.

There was only one flaw in his calculation. Margaret had a girl's romantic love of love, a child's

delight in being dazzled, but she had not yet a woman's power to face reality. That would come when her soul was fully awakened. The chances were considerable that the man who showed her the path of life would also be the man who guided her steps along its way. And there was as yet none of that exquisite trust, that reposeful love which such a woman as Margaret Hurst offers to the man into whose keeping she surrenders her life.

During the afternoon before the dance, Lady Victoria came in to tea. Lord Shelford happened to be there with Margaret and Elizabeth, and Lady Victoria began to talk to him as soon as she had explained how she wished to have her tea.

'We are going to an Anti-Suffrage meeting to-night,' she announced, 'and I know Archie will leave out all the things I most want said. He never puts things straight enough, and yet his convictions are as strong as mine. It's very hard on me; he ought to express my views. Why should I keep a dog and bark myself?'

'Forewarned is forearmed,' remarked Lord Shelford with a smile, in answer to this pathetic appeal from the lady; 'you can prime Middlesex, you know.'

'Forewarned is only fore-irritated where Archie's concerned,' answered Lady Victoria. 'I tell him he shows his antagonism to the woman on her own chiefly by discounting the woman at home—when it's me, that is.'

Margaret laughed at such a preposterous libel on the absent, while Lady Victoria turned to Lord Shelford. 'Are you as strong as Archie is against the suffrage?' she asked.

'Stronger, I should think,' put in Elizabeth.

'My dear, he couldn't be. Archie's so much troubled about it that he can hardly speak to a woman for fear of her turning out a serpent. Now, Lord Shelford, you never seem to hesitate in that direction; it's very inconsistent of you.'

'On the contrary, it's a clear indication of my feeling to the sex.'

He looked at her with a twinkle of fun, and she replied with exaggerated deference: 'Oh do explain to me, if you will be so kind!'

'I like talking to women because their response is patent; one sees the receptiveness of their minds through the play of their emotions.'

'If they have minds, you know,' said Lady Victoria demurely.

'I didn't question it, and I suppose you will allow them emotions; at any rate, I do.'

The three elders laughed, and Lady Victoria turned to Elizabeth: 'My nephew Denis tells me you are taking him to a dance to-night, and he's dining here first. It is very good of you. What dance is it?'

'It's for the Duchess of Belfast's pet charity—I always forget its name—at the Grafton Galleries, you know.'

'Oh yes, one of those excuses for frivolity

that the smart call philanthropy. Well, I hope you'll all enjoy it. Don't wear your hostess out, Margaret,' and Lady Victoria looked affectionately at Elizabeth's rather strained expression as she kissed her.

'Really I'm getting quite fond of those people,' she remarked to herself as the car took her home. 'Only I do wish they would laugh out heartily. Margaret does, but of course she would; *bon chien chasse de race*. The Shelfords always seem to stop short, as if it would commit them in some way. I'm anxious about that child though; Shelford's a dangerous man, and would turn stronger heads than hers. How young and handsome he is to be sure! And how the sense of power crops up. He could make a woman happy, I think; but I'm sure he could make her unhappy.' And Lady Victoria heroically forbore, as she got out, to worry her brother by what she called 'trying to stiffen his back for that speech.'

The dinner party was a great success; to Elizabeth's relief her father had decided not to dine with them, and had gone off to the Club. Lady Victoria's nephew took Margaret down, and they thoroughly enjoyed themselves in affectionate mimicry of her ways and speech. But when they got to the dance, it seemed to Elizabeth's anxious eyes that Charles and Margaret existed only for each other.

She had reminded him of his duties as Lord Shelford's representative, and as her own helper. It was an abiding satisfaction to poor Elizabeth

that, whatever Waters or she surmised that the other knew of those sad circumstances that had spoilt their lives, by no word or sign had any understanding ever been alluded to between them. To the world at large—to her, to him, Charles Waters was first the ward of Lord Shelford, and now his richly benefited *protégé*.

Charles's modest success at the Bar, no less than the happy investment of his little fortune, were largely owing to Lord Shelford's disinterested kindness. The great man openly alluded to him in public as almost one of the family, and lamented that so far he had not made the excellent husband he was cut out for.

As she watched Charles and Margaret dancing repeatedly together, Elizabeth felt ill at ease. The girl's eyes shone like stars, but the woman recognised that the poetic motion and the caressing music, added to the sense of physical vigour and well-being, were responsible for the joy in her face. But Charles's look gave her real pain. His beauty—always marred by an air of weakness—struck her with a sudden difference; the vacillation was no longer there, he seemed almost desperate to Elizabeth's mind, agitated as it was by exaggerated fears. She wondered afterwards how she had played her part; she was torn by her longing to be true to everyone in the miserable drama; she almost forgot the ache of her own heart which the sight of Charles with another woman never failed to bring.

As she came up from supper, she passed the two leaning over the rail, and heard him say :

‘ Is it only the dancing you care for, Margaret ? Won’t you, at any rate, let me think it’s something else as well ? ’

The torture that Elizabeth bore as she saw them floating together, time after time, grew almost insupportable. She could do nothing to stop it ; it was nearly two o’clock before she could get the party together for the return.

At last she and Margaret got back ; Charles was taking home one of the girls who had come alone, and who lived somewhere out of their direction. She and Margaret had dropped two more, and the one married couple of the party had also helped.

Lord Shelford came out of the drawing-room as they were going upstairs, and was startled by the sight of his daughter’s white face.

‘ Oh it’s been so lovely, Lord Shelford,’ cried Margaret, and she looked as brilliant as the other was careworn.

‘ I’m delighted to hear it, my dear,’ he answered, noting with approval that her splendid physique made her look quite fresh after all her exertions.

‘ You certainly don’t seem tired. Nurse has insisted on staying up for you both, and has sent Augustine to bed. What about riding to-morrow ? ’

Margaret knew she would be tired, but she also knew what was expected of her.

‘ Any time, Lord Shelford ; I’ll be ready if you tell me.’

‘ Then breakfast as usual, but we’ll ride after instead of before.’

‘ Oh how very kind of you ! I’m awfully grateful.’

Her bright face looked shyly up at him.

‘ I’ve done my Latin, when can I bring it to-morrow ? ’

‘ I can give you an hour after we ride, I’ve no engagement or meeting in the morning. We shall finish the second book soon, we have had a steady fortnight at it. Good-night ; sleep well,’ and he turned back to the drawing-room where his daughter sat with a look of helpless misery.

Poor Elizabeth ! It was the complexity of her suffering that had worn down her self-control ; that, and her physical weariness. If she had been herself she would not have betrayed to her father that she was troubled, at any rate until she had made up her mind how much she ought to say to him. As it was, she was helpless in his hands, and it was nearly three o’clock in the morning. He soon had her account, but seemed to take it much more lightly than she had feared.

‘ The child is not touched, you think, and Charles will soon get over it. Don’t let it worry you, my dear, you look worn out. Your selfish old father is much more anxious about you than about the young people. Have your breakfast in bed to-morrow and rest instead of riding.’

‘ Thank you, father ; but why are you up yourself ? ’

‘ Work, child ; the Cabinet cares are heavy just now.’

He said no more ; he belonged to the old school of reticent politicians.

The daughter went slowly upstairs, a little comforted by her father’s cheerful kindness. He followed her, and on his face was a look that boded ill to anyone who should cross his path.

CHAPTER XVI.

THOMAS SHELFORD, PAST AND PRESENT

TOWARDS the end of February, that is about a week after the dance at the Grafton Galleries, Margaret came into the library at eleven o'clock. Lord Shelford had told her at breakfast that he would be ready for her at that time ; she had changed since then and had the 'Æneid' in her hand. The ladies always went straight to the dining-room after the early ride, except on the rare occasions when they rode later. So that, whichever way it was, Margaret breakfasted in her habit, an arrangement which pleased Lord Shelford. The only present he had made her, except the travelling-case at Christmas time, was the wherewithal for her riding. He had come himself to see her try the saddle at Champion and Wilton's ; he had given his daughter instructions to procure all the necessary adjuncts. The habits—a thin one for the Park and a thick one for hunting—had been made by the man who fitted Elizabeth, in order to ensure their looking well off the horse as well as on it. What Lord Shelford thought of a woman who rode cross-saddle he had mercifully kept so

far chiefly to himself. Her boots and trees positively frightened Margaret by their price, when she had them a year back ; she had not known how to thank him for giving her so much. He had laughed and said that they were un-birthday instead of birthday presents. And now, when she had come again to Bryanston Square in January, he had insisted on new hats being sent to the house, and he made her try them on before him. Her inexperience led her to think that he was only particular as to neatness on horseback, and she had suffered a perpetual nightmare lest her glorious hair should be untidy. Lord Shelford did not allow a low collar, and Margaret's neck wear was always scrupulously trim. He had taken good care not to let her know that she was one of those extremely rare women who look their best on horseback ; he often paid her compliments about her appearance on some special occasion, but he never let her know that she was incapable on a horse of looking otherwise than strikingly handsome.

He valued in a woman, almost above all else, her active wish to please ; he had no intention of letting Margaret rest secure of his approval ; he meant her to answer to his moods, and he used flattery to a woman as he would use spurs to a horse. He loved to make the colour come to her cheek ; his delight in mastery was fast changing to the desire for possession. Yet he held back ; the child must be virtually his before he went through the form of asking her. He was not the man to give

any woman cause to expect him to be dragged at her chariot-wheels. Easter he noted came late that year, and Mallow would be looking lovely when Margaret saw it again. It should make a fitting background to the scene for which he judged the time was nearly ripe. He had no intention of being a father to the girl ; there was never anything paternal in his manner towards her. He meant to have from Margaret the love that he wished for, and to have it expressed in the way that suited him.

One day when they were alone he astonished Elizabeth by telling her that he meant to ride in the Hunt Point to Point on Easter Monday.

‘ But you haven’t ridden in a race for some years, father,’ she said ; ‘ do you think you should ? ’

‘ Why not ? ’ was his answer, and the daughter kept silence.

She herself was a good horsewoman, and she knew that in riding her father did not show his usual judgment. But she dared say no more, and merely inquired what horse he had chosen.

‘ His Lordship,’ he answered briefly ; ‘ and I do wish Middlesex had not given him such a ridiculous name.’

‘ Are you quite sure he’s up to your weight ? ’ ventured Elizabeth.

‘ Yes, of course ; do you suppose Stokes doesn’t know his business ? ’

Again Elizabeth dared not point out that her father’s servants were generally more obsequious than other people’s, and that, excellent stud-groom

as Stokes undoubtedly was, he was morally incapable of standing up to his overbearing master, except on a matter of fact. When opinion is in question the uneducated are almost always at a disadvantage with their superiors.

As Margaret came into the big room, she gave a start of surprise. On the billard-table, which she had never seen used out of its purpose before, was a confused litter of papers and mysterious objects. And this was not the only thing that struck her. Lord Shelford's eyes were fixed on her with curious intentness ; he was standing upright with his back to the fire watching the door ; if Margaret had not known that the thing was preposterous, she would almost have thought that he was waiting for her. But he never allowed anyone to keep him ; often she had waited for him, but she had never seen him in attendance upon the movements of others. Nor did he do his work standing or pacing about, as is the custom with many men of his kind : he wrote rapidly at his table, he read rapidly in his chair ; thoughts came quickly to him, and he did not spend time in musing and smoking before his decisions. Margaret was aware of a subtle change in him, or, rather, of something unusual in his demeanour. He made a movement as though to meet her, but restrained himself, and merely nodded as he stood on the hearth. When she came forward with her book, Lord Shelford spoke in his customary clear-cut tones.

‘ Not the “ Æneid ” to-day, my dear,’ he said.

‘I want a talk with you. It is so pleasant to me to have your presence here and now, that I forget how many years there are behind me of which you know nothing. I should like to tell you something of my life in the past.’

He paused and watched the quick flush mount up to Margaret’s brows. Even as he looked he found himself wishing that women could keep their girlhood’s habit of colouring naturally, and wondered cynically if they were aware of their loss, and if that was the reason of their lamentable folly in make-up.

‘Oh thank you, dear Lord Shelford, I shall love it. It’s most awfully good of you ; there is so much I want to ask.’

‘Ask away, Margaret ; I’m more than ready to answer your questions.’

‘No, please,’ said the girl, suddenly shy. ‘I’d rather you told me in your own way.’

Lord Shelford laughed.

‘I’ll tell you nothing till you ask some special question ; you said you wished to ask, and now you’ve got to.’

Beneath the teasing tone, Margaret’s training perceived the ring of determination, and her obedience answered promptly.

‘Well then, please, what is all that untidy muddle on the billiard-table ?’

Lord Shelford smiled ; Margaret seldom failed him now.

‘That muddle, as you call it, is what I have prepared, at the expense of much time and pains,

as the lantern slides with which to illustrate this interesting lecture, madam ; if you will favour me with your attention, we'll begin here.'

He dropped his mockery, and taking up a miniature said, lightly but naturally: 'That's the first existing picture of your humble servant, Margaret.'

The girl took from his hand the delicate painting of a child of two or three years ; the large, grave baby eyes were unmistakably the eyes that were looking at her now.

'My mother used to wear it, and then my wife ; for many years no one has seen it.'

In every true woman, however young, exists that exquisite reverence for childhood that it is the privilege of her sex to keep unshared.

As Margaret bent over it, the tears were in her eyes ; she lingered so long with it in her hand, that Lord Shelford gently took it from her. 'There's the baby now, you see,' he said, pointing to the great portrait of himself which had been the Academy success of a few years back.

Margaret gazed with a new thrill at the handsome pictured presence, then back at the real one that seemed to her to make the picture but a poor reflection.

'Now I must show you something of my life between those two stages. Here's the photograph of my house eleven ; I was never much good at cricket, though ; they put me in because among the lot of us who were pretty equally bad I could bowl a bit left-handed. And how proud I was !

Look here, though. Can you make me out in my college eight ? ’

Margaret had no difficulty in putting her finger on the right figure, and Shelford went on well pleased.

‘ Here’s the certificate of my first in Greats, which my dear mother kept. And then she wanted a photograph in my Master of Arts’ gown, but I never let anyone else have it. That’s why there are several copies. It’s rather good, though. I wasn’t always old, you see, Margaret ; in those days people wore whiskers.’

He handed her the presentment of a mid-Victorian Adonis ; how handsome he was ! But to Margaret’s eyes, accustomed only to the modern and the antique, the fashion of that moment was a jarring note.

‘ I think you are handsomer now, Lord Shelford,’ she said with kindling eyes.

But the man made a gesture of annoyance, and then sighed with a sudden sadness. The pathos of the past that was done with now, and was grudged its due, came over him.

The girl had taken the photograph to the light and did not see the pain or the sudden weary look of age on her friend’s face. When she came back to the table, she put it down without asking for the copy he had meant to give her. But now he had full command of himself, and he did not again lose any fraction of it.

‘ Here’s my first election address ; look at it, and you’ll learn a great deal of political history

with very little trouble. How different the cries are now ! I don't know whether it's age, Margaret, but I think they were more genuine then.'

' I suppose they are got up to a certain degree now ? '

' Say, rather, to an uncertain degree ; that's the worst of it. Here's another ; my first Parliament was a very short one. The portrait on this isn't exactly flattering, is it ? '

' It's a positive libel,' answered Margaret vehemently, and Lord Shelford laughed at her indignation.

' This is my first considerable speech in the House ; my wife kept all the cuttings about it together, you see ; she died soon after that. It really made rather a stir.'

He took up one report, while Margaret read another ; the Prime Minister of the day had truly said of his opponent's maiden speech that it contained more than a promise of power.

Lord Shelford pointed to several cases.

' Don't you want to know what's in those, Margaret ? '

' Yes, indeed,' she answered eagerly.

' Presentation keys and trowels,' he said with wicked glee. ' Quite the dullest, ugliest things ever put into velvet and leather, eh, young lady ? Of course you thought they were jewels. This is, though ; I gave Elizabeth all her mother's ornaments when she came out except this ; she was too young for it then, and I am still old-fashioned enough to think it unsuitable to a single woman.'

He pressed a spring and a fine tiara flashed in the sun. Margaret did not speak, and, shutting it up, he pushed it carelessly to one side.

‘Here’s the series of propagandist speeches I made when first in the Government; they had them all put into a pamphlet, you see. Here are one or two letters you may care to read, but I needn’t tell you not to tell anyone about them. Does it strike you that I’m trusting you pretty completely, young woman?’ He looked at her full in the eyes as he placed three letters in her hand, and Margaret was beyond speech.

He walked away to stir the fire, leaving her free to read the letters. The first was the then Prime Minister’s offer of the Viceroyalty, an honest tribute of which any man might well be proud. The next was his refusal, a masterly piece of writing, in which he seemed as usual to dominate the situation. The last was not two years old: Sir Gilbert Alston’s invitation to him to join the present Cabinet. Even Margaret’s inexperience could tell how flattering were its terms.

‘But you are Secretary of State for India,’ said Margaret, as she put the letters back into his hand, ‘and that’s not what Sir Gilbert offers.’

‘Very observant of you, my dear,’ said Lord Shelford, and his lips shut in a hard line.

Margaret felt, as she was meant to feel, that here were matters beyond her scope.

Then he took up a curiously shaped box.

‘This is my patent of nobility, Margaret ; a queer document ; we’ll read it together and I’ll explain it.’ The two bent over it side by side, when he had taken it out of its case ; both put a hand on it to keep it flat.

‘I have little pleasure in being the first Lord Shelford, my dear, and much pain in being the last. You see, I am rather lonely ; my wife had been dead many years when these dignities came to me, and it’s heavy work bearing unshared honours.’ He smiled sadly, and his hearer’s heart went out to him. ‘As one gets older, Margaret, things lose their savour ; life itself becomes less worth having as one nears its boundaries. Some day you will not be sorry to remember that you brought much happiness to the last years of a very lonely man.’ He took her hand, as he had done once or twice before, but with a tender intimacy that, so far, he had not trusted himself to show. And then, for the first time, Lord Shelford kissed it.

As Margaret, overcome with many emotions, hurried from the room, she almost ran against Waters coming into it.

‘Well, Charles, and what do you want here ? ’ asked Lord Shelford sharply, as the door closed behind the girl.

‘Why, they’ve telephoned from Downing Street to ask if you will lunch there to-day ; the Prime Minister’s got Sir Nigel Templeton, and he wants some talk about India. I’m to let them know by half-past twelve.’

‘Yes, I’ll go,’ said Lord Shelford; ‘better say so at once.’

‘There’s no hurry,’ said Waters. ‘I say, what’s all this?—a cupboard tidying?’ And he looked with curiosity and mystification at the strange assortment on the table.

Lord Shelford made a strong effort and spoke with his usual good-humour.

‘Get that message sent, my boy, and then come back, and I’ll tell you all about it. I want a talk with you, too.’

Waters was delayed in getting his message through, and when he got back the billiard-table was clear, and Lord Shelford plunged at once into talk. So, after all, Charles Waters never got his explanation. What he was told drove it out of his head, but long afterwards it came back, and he asked Elizabeth if she remembered it; but she knew nothing about it.

‘Charles,’ said Lord Shelford, ‘I don’t want you to count on it, because I’m not certain yet if I can manage it, but I believe I’ve got you the chance of a lifetime.’

Waters broke into rather indistinct thanks. One of the ways in which he annoyed Lord Shelford was his failure to enunciate well. Another was the likeness, in her son’s handsome face, to the one woman Lord Shelford could not forget. Charles recalled her sometimes too much, sometimes too little.

His adviser went on:

‘I believe you will—in a month or less—be

offered a judgeship in the High Court of Calcutta. All I can say is, that if you do get it, you'll be a lucky fellow ; the pay is a very different story from any you can get here.'

Charles pulled himself together, and his words were clear enough even for Lord Shelford's fastidious ears, as he said : ' I don't know how to thank you ; I seem to have been thanking you ever since I was a boy, and never to have been able to show my gratitude. But I don't want to go abroad ; you have done so well with my money—such as it is—and are so generous in giving me a home here, that, now I am getting on better at the Bar, I don't mind about more money.'

The older man looked very good-natured as he placed a hand on the younger's shoulder.

' My boy, that's nonsense, and we both know it. You'll never make a real success at the Bar. Why are you here this morning instead of in chambers ? '

Waters muttered something about working at home and his clerk telephoning.

Lord Shelford allowed himself a note of grave warning in his voice, but he kept his affectionate manner.

' Charles, I often feel worried about you ; you haven't the grit I should like to see, and I want to know you're provided for. Remember, I can't last for ever. This chance comes to you just at the right time ; one of the gaps in my own life is that I've seen so little out of England. You are in the prime of manhood, and of course you are

going to jump at this chance ; you'd be a fool otherwise. I only trust that I have not raised your hopes for nothing.'

Charles Waters did not look as if he was indulging in particularly brilliant aspirations ; but Lord Shelford took no notice of the absence of heartiness in the young man's manner ; his powers of observation were under control, like most of his other powers, and when a thing was inconvenient he was frequently blind to it. He was really fond of Charles, and was privately hurt that his prize was received so coldly ; but inasmuch as he offered it for the very reason that made the other loth to take it, Lord Shelford did not mean to allow explanations. He proceeded to tell Waters some of the details of the appointment's history—what leverage he had used to create the vacancy.

The depression of the younger man did not seem lightened. He began again, ' I can't say how good I think you are to me,' when the elder cut him short.

' Don't thank me, Charles ; I'm only too glad to feel that you are well provided for. I shall miss you at every turn, and I hope you'll be a bit sorry to go ; but in this world one must take the rough with the smooth, and there's no question of the right course here, more especially as you are heart-whole. India is not the country to take a young girl to, but nice women from home are to be met with there sometimes. Keep your eyes open.'

He laughed and held out his hand, and Charles Waters wrung it ; as usual he felt at a disadvantage

with his splendid friend. His weak will abandoned the contest before it was begun ; he saw that he was to go, and knew that it would be futile to struggle against it. Besides it would be painful ; he did not mean that Margaret's name should pass between them.

As this happened also to be the intention of the other, she was not spoken of, and Charles congratulated himself afterwards that he had not let her be dragged in.

Poor Charles, with his feeble character and handsome face ! His well-stored mind should never have lent itself to some of the work for which he had used it ; but he was, after all, a not unlovable personality, and if he fell into the hands of a good and capable woman, there were hopes that he could ' keep the square.'

' A thousand thanks, Lord Shelford ; if I could owe you more than I did before, I should do so now. It will be an awful break to me to leave you ; I don't think I could make you understand what it means to me. Of course, it's not the same to you. " More health and happiness betide my liege than can my care-tuned tongue deliver him." '

The elder man smiled as he shook his head and said : ' You needn't fear that I shan't feel it. " I shall find time, Cassius, I shall find time." ' But we can't play this game all the morning. I'm busy, and Downing Street has upset my calculations for the whole day. Just copy this out for me,

will you? And, by-the-by, Charles, if you get this thing, there'll be short shrift before you go. You'll have to go in four or five weeks.' And Lord Shelford sat down at his table with the manner that always indicated that an interview was closed.

He made a private note to send instructions to his solicitor; he had had the will prepared that he and Elizabeth had agreed upon, and he meant to sign it on his wedding-day. But half Waters' portion was enough for him now with this assured position, and Lord Shelford was well aware that twenty-five thousand pounds to Charles would look generous when his will was published, but that double the amount would be excessive, and would thus provoke undesirable talk. He wrote steadily until it was time to go to Downing Street, when he took some of his papers to his secretary as he went out. He felt a movement of rage against the women who now would not let him walk without personal assault; but he looked a kindly greeting at the policeman who was safeguarding his door. So far the Suffragettes had not discovered his riding, and he was not condemned to forgo exercise altogether.

Elizabeth noticed that Margaret was silent and pre-occupied at luncheon. As she did not know what had passed between the girl and her father, she put it down to regret at his absence, or to possible shortcomings on Margaret's part during the Latin reading. She took no notice, and suddenly Margaret said, with rather a sigh:

'I've promised to go to Mrs. Bamfield's to tea to-day ; I shall go in a taxi ; it's ages off.'

'I can take you quite well,' said Elizabeth. 'I've met Mrs. Bamfield and I'll go in with you. Father said I could have the car this afternoon.'

In London the Shelfords had only one car, except in the season, and the prior claim on it was the master's.

'No, do let me do it with taxis, dear Elizabeth ; I want to go in to Grannie on the way back ; I haven't been this week.'

'But I can do that perfectly too ; I want to call late in Eaton Place on Lady Templeton, so that fits excellently. It is so easy to arrange when one knows your poor dear Grannie is always in.'

Elizabeth's delicate consideration for Margaret's slender purse was unwavering and constant ; she really was fond of the girl, and recognised her worth as well as her attractiveness. She was especially pleased that Margaret did not neglect her visits to her grandmother ; Elizabeth pitied Lady Saintsbury not only for her infirmities of body, but for her loneliness at the end of life. She caught herself wondering rather wistfully how she herself would take old age when it came ; or would it rather be old age that took her ?

Margaret was still profoundly moved by the scene in the library when she and Elizabeth started on their round. She looked pale and seemed pre-occupied. Elizabeth wondered whether she was

thinking of Lord Shelford or of Roger. She felt pretty sure that Charles had no place in either her heart or her mind, and that, at any rate, was something to be thankful for. Elizabeth's programme in life might almost be said to be the care of her father; she loved him with the maternal side of her nature, finding it easy to make excuses for him, except where her mother was concerned; the ambitious side, which she inherited from that father himself, seemed to be turned entirely to pride in him.

She roused herself to ask Margaret if she knew where the house was. Mrs. Bamfield lived in a little road leading out of the Earl's Court Road; or rather it did not turn directly out of the main thoroughfare, but lay some way back, and was very difficult to find. Elizabeth was not sure whether she had ever been to the far end of the Cromwell Road before; she was quite sure that the men would not find the direction unaided. She spoke through the tube, telling the footman to inquire the way.

'I can't think why servants object so much to asking. They are too stupid. There, they've passed a postman and a milkman; both would have been certain to know.'

Margaret said she was sure she knew it well enough to explain; but the roads were alike, and she made one mistake, and then it took some time to find it out.

At last they arrived. Margaret was sure that

so prosperous-looking a car did not often stand in that street. Indeed the house looked very small and dingy ; it was a meanly built, poor place, although when the pert little front-door was opened, it revealed itself unmistakably as the abode of gentlefolk.

Mrs. Bamfield was at home and glad to see them ; she determined that Margaret's rejection of her son should make no difference in her manner. Margaret was equally determined on the same thing, with the inevitable result that they were constrained and unnatural. Elizabeth did her best, but she was never very good at making a difficult situation easy. Margaret despised herself for caring for such things, but she could not forget that the smoky fire was a poor one, and that the easy chairs were mostly wicker. Mrs. Bamfield, with her untidy Irish ways, had no genius for comfort, and did not understand what an English home meant. Poor Roger sometimes felt that his mother did not even wish to ; they were by no means wealthy, but they need not have lived as they did.

There was no cream for tea, and hardly any cakes, and Margaret, sinking every moment in her own estimation, appeared to Mrs. Bamfield rather sulky.

Roger was not mentioned until Elizabeth asked after him, when his mother, with an unconscious note of aggression in her tone, assured them that he was very well. But Margaret loved Mrs. Bamfield's

beautiful expression and sweet voice. When they rose to go, she kissed Roger's mother warmly, and said how glad she had been to see her. Still the visit had been a failure, and they both knew it.

Elizabeth and Margaret went on to Eaton Terrace. Though the house was smaller, it was of a very different character. Elizabeth said a word or two of the impression Mrs. Bamfield's *ménage* had made on her, and Lady Saintsbury took it up too eagerly. It was not suprising that Margaret, when they returned to Bryanston Square, felt a pride in the stately mansion which held so much for her. Lord Shelford met them in the hall asking where they had been, and then he took Elizabeth aside into her own morning-room to break his news to her in private.

While Margaret upstairs was at last free to live over again in solitude the tremulous delights of the morning, Elizabeth was hearing from her father the fate mapped out for Charles. It was not an easy task for any man, but Lord Shelford accomplished it, and with so much consideration and tenderness for his daughter, whose feelings he understood and sympathised with, that at the end she loved him the better for this last blow. Surely it had been said with truth that one man may steal a horse and another may not look over the stable door.

CHAPTER XVII

A DEPARTURE AND A SPEECH

MARGARET was naturally very sorry to hear of Charles Waters's departure, but when Lord Shelford explained to her how greatly it was to his advantage, her pleasure quickly predominated. Margaret's behaviour about it was as perfect as simple good feeling could make it. Charles's melancholy passed easily for natural regret at the snapping of so many ties, but Lord Shelford was not sorry as the days drew on to the first week in April, when the boat was due to sail. It is never safe to calculate on what a weak man will say or do; when Waters had taken his depression away, Lord Shelford knew that he would feel more comfortable in his own house.

One evening in March he came in late to tea, and found Elizabeth alone in the drawing-room. He stood up in front of the fire with his cup on the chimney-piece. Elizabeth thought he had not looked so young and well for years.

'She's a nice child, eh, Elizabeth?' he said abruptly after a moment's silence.

‘ Yes, father, she is indeed. She is both sterling and sweet ; I have come to love her very much.’

Lord Shelford smiled down at his daughter, the careless happiness in his face was a great contrast, as always, to the look of strain in hers. Elizabeth was glad to see him alone, she seldom got private talk with him now.

‘ Father, she is very devoted to you ; it’s touching to see you together, she almost vibrates to your touch.’

Lord Shelford smiled, but he did not speak.

‘ Yet she has a good deal of strength of character and much modest dignity ; she will never discredit you in any circumstances.’ Elizabeth hesitated, and then went on : ‘ And, of course, she has brains and good looks far above the average.’

Lord Shelford nodded, then he said carelessly : ‘ You see I know something of women, though, of course, a girl is a more difficult subject. I was struck with her genuine mind that first time you had her at Mallow, but I didn’t expect to find all I have done. Yes, she’ll grow into a fine woman, if she isn’t spoilt.’

Elizabeth’s smile was a little wan as she remarked : ‘ You won’t spoil her at any rate. Don’t be too hard on her, father ; she’s highly strung and feels keenly.’

Lord Shelford nodded again, but his daughter could not be sure if he was attending to her or not.

‘ I think I shall ask her after the Point to Point,

Elizabeth ; she'll be strung up then, if you like,' and he gave a laugh that somehow rang false to Elizabeth. ' But I shall give her warning of what to expect, so that there's no chance of anything going wrong.'

Elizabeth noticed that he could not even use the word refusal, much less contemplate the fact.

' I don't understand,' she said.

' Why, if I let her see clearly that I am going to propose to her, she would betray at once, before I had spoken, if there was anything in the way between us.'

' Well,' answered his daughter, ' she is certainly very much in love with you. You do care for her, don't you ? Of course she's the luckiest girl in the world, but she needs love.'

' All women do, my dear,' said her father, as he stooped and kissed her lightly. ' Margaret shall have all that's good for her, never fear.'

Elizabeth sighed ; she seldom pressed her father when he showed that a subject was done with, but this evening she felt bolder than usual.

' You do love her, father, for herself I mean, not just because she adores you ? ' she repeated.

Lord Shelford frowned. ' Of course I do ; why should I want to marry her if I didn't ? I should have thought it was pretty evident that I'm fond of her.'

The door opened and Margaret herself entered. Lord Shelford turned, and then spoke quickly :

' What are you wearing, ear-rings ? '

‘ Yes,’ said Margaret, ‘ Grannie gave me this old pair.’

‘ Have you had your ears pierced ? ’ pursued Lord Shelford.

‘ No,’ said Elizabeth, ‘ they have had screws put to them ; you just fasten them in.’

She knew that her father was a little on edge after their conversation, and she dreaded a sharp speech for Margaret ; she hoped by answering for her to keep the girl out of the discussion.

‘ People wear them so much now,’ she went on, ‘ it seemed a pity not to use them, and I think they suit Margaret.’

‘ How do you say you wear them ? ’ asked Lord Shelford.

Margaret, who was immensely pleased with her fresh adornment, answered : ‘ You just screw them on ; it’s quite easy.’

‘ Then just screw them off,’ said Lord Shelford grimly, ‘ and don’t let me see them again. You are far too young for that sort of thing.’

Elizabeth looked at him imploringly ; the child had been so proud of her new toy, and now her face was the picture of disappointment. But she was already beginning to take the jewels out, and his quick eyes noted that her discomfiture was quite free from resentment. He smiled, and said in a kinder tone :

‘ Your ears are too pretty to spoil, my dear ; leave them alone.’

Elizabeth thought this speech was hardly com-

pensation enough, but Lord Shelford was already teaching Margaret to prefer his exercise of authority to her own freedom.

The day that Charles was to start for India was one of the worst that an English spring can turn out. It added to the necessary sadness of the farewells, and when at last it was over, Lord Shelford felt the relief of complete ease. The leave-taking had been painful, but the national reticence had been a great help.

Elizabeth's heart was very sore and heavy; she was however so unused to indulging her own feelings, that she gave very little trouble to anyone. Lord Shelford did not like people 'moping about,' as he phrased it.

Mrs. Drew suggested that Augustine should take a day's outing, in order that she should be with 'her child' and once more put her to bed. Elizabeth felt grateful to the never-failing love which she knew had also helped her mother; she never forgot Nurse's goodness during the hard years of her youth. She had no one else who knew the things of which she never spoke; lonely as Miss Shelford was, she would have been distinctly more lonely without old Mrs. Drew.

A clause embodying a compromise on female suffrage had been tacked on to a franchise bill in the Commons and passed through a hesitating House. Lord Shelford was to speak against it in the Lords, and Margaret was very keen to hear him.

Bryanston Square was migrating shortly to

Mallow, and both the women looked forward to the country before a strenuous season. Lord Shelford was working hard and Margaret saw less of him than usual ; when they were together he was more affectionate in manner than he had appeared before. Elizabeth was so fond of her father, that she did not see how any girl could fail to feel his attraction.

‘ He’s wonderful, isn’t he, Margaret,’ she said one day. ‘ I never know whether his vigour of mind or body is the most astonishing ; and he takes it all so easily too. This speech on a question so near to his heart would burden most men and make them morose ; he is as full of general interests as ever.’

Margaret assented with a new reserve, which taught her companion that her feeling was keener than when she could speak of it more openly. Elizabeth had not long before confided to Lady Victoria the fact of Roger’s refusal which Lady Saintsbury had handed on to her. ‘ Of course, my dear,’ had been all the comment Lady Victoria would vouchsafe. Elizabeth did not speak too often of her father to Margaret ; the girl valued highly the talk when it did come.

‘ I don’t know why he’s riding in the Point to Point,’ she went on ; ‘ he hasn’t done so for some years, and I should have thought he had enough to do without that.’

‘ He does look so splendid in pink,’ exclaimed Margaret, in a sudden burst of open, simple admiration ; ‘ anyone else looks common beside him.’

'You must watch him carefully when he's speaking, Margaret; he's very good to look at then. He is so keen on his subject, too. I hope the Suffragettes won't harass us when he rides; it's the only exercise he gets in London. They don't seem to know that he rides early, and are content with stopping his walking. I feel so apologetic to the succession of policemen at our door.'

'Well,' said Margaret, 'he always nods to them, and they must like that.'

Elizabeth smiled; even she had her private doubts as to that compensation being adequate to the labour.

When the day of the debate came, the two ladies drove down to the House together. They shared the excitement—not altogether pleasurable—that is felt by the members of his family, when a man is going to make an important speech. Margaret sat with Elizabeth and tried hard to attend to each speaker. But she soon found that, though the words were clear enough, they did not really enter her mind. Her tension was either too great or not great enough; something was wrong with her. The House was packed; the peeresses filled their gallery, and daughters were excluded until half-past five, so that Elizabeth was obliged to be downstairs and chose to sit with her guest. Margaret tried to keep out of her mind that Shelford's wife would have had the privilege of listening to him from a better place. It seemed all rather like a

dream—detached and nonsensical thoughts flitted across her mind, and the Trial scene in ‘Alice in Wonderland’ teased her by its recurrence.

Lord Shelford rose at six o’clock ; the benches were very full. He spoke at a high level, reasoning closely, concisely, conclusively, to a breathless audience.

Margaret could not take in the meaning of the cogent phrases, try as she would. She felt haunted by the sense that she was losing a great opportunity, yet the time went on and she could not grasp the effect of the whole. Suddenly the peroration caught hold of her and she felt alert in mind for the first time ; it was easy to follow, but, had she known it, not the best part of his speech, only the carving on the framework. His voice dropped, though it was very clear ; his usual easy mastery seemed to have deserted him ; the practised changes of voice and expression were gone ; instead was a manner grimly impressive and almost solemn. Elizabeth was struck by something she had never before known in him, and a conviction came upon her that he had ceased to consider whether he was in tune with his audience or not, had even ceased to think of his effect at all. Her surprise increased as her father’s last words came with manifest effort.

‘ My Lords, I have tried to show the illogicality of this proposal. I have tried also to show how in my opinion it cuts at the roots from which morality springs. Yet again, I have tried to

show that civilised government no less than barbarous tyranny has rested, does rest and must rest on physical force—that if you shift the responsibilities of the stronger sex on to the weaker, you unsex them both. I have done. I have uttered what is in me in protest against the greatest danger that has ever threatened our realm, a danger that threatens our existence as a nation of men. I have done. But I entreat, I passionately entreat your Lordships' House to pause and consider while this disaster may still be averted. For from this going forward, there is no turning back. If we fight against those basic instincts of our nature, too deep for our puny analysis—if we do violence to those inmost fibres of our being, too strong for our imperfect understanding—be sure that the violence will not go unpunished. Let us hold fast our primal feelings, lest they perish from disuse ; Nature has a vengeance in store for those who outrage her by affronting her ordinance. She has given to man an instinct both to govern woman and to exalt her ; let us beware lest we wrong those instincts and they cease to be ours to wrong.'

In the dead silence of a crowded assembly—so far more moving than any applause—Lord Shelford sat down, white to the lips. Margaret eagerly watched for some look towards her. But Lord Shelford was beyond that ; he was learning that the end of his life held a new experience for him, one moreover that he felt to be worth having. For once his convictions had laid hold of his powers ;

he was content. He had spoken with words that wronged his ideas, with thoughts that were betrayed by the poverty of his own utterance ; but to-day he cared nothing for the success of his speech. He and not another had made it, and that was enough.

CHAPTER XVIII

LADY VICTORIA BREAKS THE ICE

THE Easter house-party at Mallow would certainly have been pleasanter if Lawrence Hyde had not been there. But Elizabeth Shelford, in compliance with that undefined compact with her father which was all the more binding for its vagueness, felt compelled to produce a young man as an ostensible companion for Margaret, and as an actual foil to Lord Shelford. Waters was hard to replace ; he had fitted so naturally into his niche that until he became troublesome he was invaluable. Anyone too attractive might prove dangerous, yet it might be a trifle odd, even suspicious, to Lady Victoria's sharp eyes, if a nonentity were picked out.

The Shelfords had the wisdom not to fill their house. The Vincents came, and Mr. and Mrs. Brough—the first volume of his ' History of India ' had greatly added to Brough's reputation. Sir Nigel Templeton—a former governor of Madras—brought his bride, a very pretty young woman whom he had married in India. There had been a good deal of talk at the time of the engagement ;

people said he had never been attracted before. There was still more talk of the bride's luck in catching him—she was one of several penniless sisters—but as a matter of fact Lady Templeton was more genuinely in love with her hero than Sir Nigel was with his new accessory. Margaret realised this quite soon, but no one else was fully aware of it, though much of the comedy was plain to any observer.

Sir Nigel greatly desired that his wife should shine in society; this was, to say the least, unreasonable. She was the daughter of a poor Indian officer, and had no experience of English life and ways outside the walls of a second-rate boarding-school, nor had she any natural aptitude towards that vague state which her husband was perpetually holding up to her and crystallising into the alarming phrase—'taking your place as my wife.' But her sweet temper, her unfeigned devotion to her rather pompous lord, together with her merciful lack of humour, and her exquisite looks, could safely be predicted to carry her through any difficulties she was likely to meet. She was of that type of beauty which Burne-Jones made peculiarly his own, and her dear little nose and slightly parted lips did not lose by comparison with those of the more highly-born ladies of the party. For Mrs. Brough, whose ancient lineage was even dearer to her than her beauty, had the accentuated nose and rather large, firm mouth which are often seen in Englishwomen of her class; her fine eyes, her

splendid figure, and her crown of hair like 'ripe corn,' made her a singularly handsome woman, and her features were quite good enough to defy criticism ; but in Lady Victoria the nose and mouth were exaggerated, and so they were in Margaret also, though very slightly. Altogether, Sir Nigel had no need to feel dissatisfied when his wife's looks came into competition with those of other women. But her mind was woefully at a disadvantage, though, there again, there was hope that her sweet disposition and wish to please would not fail to make her a charming woman, though she was likely always to be a stupid one.

Mr. and Mrs. Perrin were the nucleus of the party. Rowland Perrin was the new editor of the chief Government newspaper, *The London Hour*, and beneath an exaggerated appreciation of good living, he concealed an unexaggerated appreciation of more important things. His wife's brains were said to go into leaders in the paper, and into criticism of those who had the privilege of being for the moment her companions. She had an uncomfortable way of watching other people commit themselves, and of seeming to keep aloof and to commune only with herself, and in a rarer atmosphere.

Margaret and Mr. Hyde made up the number of the guests.

Lawrence Hyde was at this time in perhaps the most objectionable phase of his career ; he had already lost the interest of the few people

who had given much thought to him, and had disappointed his old friends, without making new ones. But to the Shelfords he had his uses, and one was that, being in his own view superior, and in that of most people inferior, to an interest in great affairs, he was certain not to find out the *raison d'être* of the gathering. For a cloud on the Indian horizon had seemed to Shelford and Lord Middlesex to call for deliberation early in the day, hence the choice of the little gathering of quiet, trustworthy experts. Steady work was being done by the handful of men who figured in the papers as enjoying a complete rest.

The guests assembled on the Thursday before Easter, and on the morning of Good Friday all the ladies went to church, accompanied by Lord Middlesex, Shelford, and Sir Nigel Templeton. Lady Victoria noticed the intent look that Margaret fixed on Lord Shelford as he read the familiar lessons, his fine voice and scholarly appreciation rendering them adequately and not dramatically. As they walked across the park, the rest of the party met them.

'Did you decide whether Christianity had done more to beautify or to uglify the world?' asked Lawrence Hyde, fastening on poor Lady Templeton and bringing to the surface all her latent fears of saying the wrong thing. Receiving only a gasping reply he went on: 'Personally I have no doubt——' when they were joined by Lady Victoria.

'I shouldn't think you ever have, Mr. Hyde,' she

said sharply, and then turning to Lady Templeton : ' How very handsome Mrs. Brough is with that stately carriage, and the glorious fair hair and blue eyes, quite a Tintoretto.'

' That kind always ends in real life by becoming a Rubens, though,' said Lawrence.

' That's better,' snapped Lady Victoria, ' than looking like a futurist production which I think you explained last evening was the only hope left to us. But don't let us keep you walking so slowly, do join the men ; I daresay you have as much to say to them as I have to Lady Templeton.'

Even Lawrence was thus constrained to walk on, while Lady Victoria said : ' There's the result of theories. Lord and Lady Charles were nice people with the best intentions, but they never chose to realise what they owed to their circumstances. They determined that their son should not be submitted to the snobbish influences of public school and college ; so the youth was encouraged to discover himself, which he did frequently, and to study abroad, which he did intermittently. Mercifully, his dear parents died before they had discovered him, or rather the absence of any real him. They were sad examples of intellectual sympathies without mental discipline or training, and of high ideals without humility. They had vague kindliness with no sense of humour, and a capacity for taking themselves seriously that would have been fatal to most people. It was about the worst atmosphere a boy could grow up in ; Lawrence has all their

weakness without their personal sincerity, or intellectual interests, and with a vulgarity of mind all his own.'

She paused, and her hearer said : ' Dear me, and I thought he was so clever ! ' and Lady Victoria saw that her tirade had only confused Lady Templeton without enlightening her. So she set herself quietly to explain things and people at Mallow for the rest of the walk to the house to such good purpose that the bride felt distinctly less out of it when she got home. Lord Middlesex good naturedly helped her, after a hint from his sister, and she bore her part at luncheon with much greater ease than she had hitherto shown.

That evening Shelford devoted himself more markedly to Margaret than he had ever done in public. He spoke to her across the dinner-table, asking her opinion, and started subjects on which he knew that he could bring her out. When the men came into the drawing-room he took a chair near her ; in a short time Margaret was unconscious of all around her except Shelford's piercing eyes and tender smile. He appealed to her imagination by being sympathetic to many calls of her nature ; he had intellect, kindness, position, success ; nothing seemed left out ; a student, a sportsman, a power in the land, he was fast drawing Margaret to him by many magnets. She had lost to a great extent the habit of thinking, to some extent even the desire ; if she had dealt quite honestly with herself, she would have seen two of the strongest

appeals Shelford made were to her vanity and to her ambition. Lady Victoria saw it only too plainly, and debated long whether she should speak to the girl ; she was fully aware how much flattery Margaret had had lately, and feared to offend her and to drive her more towards Shelford if she should seem to criticise either her or him.

Under cover of showing her something in a paper her brother said : ' Shelford's forcing the pace, but he's riding for a fall.'

' I don't know ; I'm anxious,' she answered.

' You have no need to be so, in my opinion,' he replied, and he would say no more.

His sister tried to share his confidence, but she failed.

At last she decided to trust to the sweetness of Margaret's nature, and to try, before it was too late, to prevent what she regarded as an unnatural marriage. At any rate Margaret should go into this thing with open eyes, even if it cost Lady Victoria some present trouble and opened some old wounds. So at breakfast, at which most of the party were present, for Shelford's house always had the atmosphere of work rather than of smartness, Lady Victoria took the plunge.

' Margaret, give up all your plans this morning and take me for a five-mile walk ; I am the oldest and you are the youngest, so we are certain to get on together best. It's a quarter past ten now ; I have two notes to write, but at eleven I shall expect you in the hall. *Au revoir,*' and Lady Victoria

cut short the girl's protestations of pleasure by going hurriedly upstairs.

'Are there no dogs to take?' asked the older woman of the younger one as they started. 'I love animals, do you? Yes? I'm glad. I never can feel quite the same to those who don't. Now I come to think of it, I've never seen the Shelfords with dogs, except for use.'

'Oh but they are devoted to horses,' said Margaret eagerly, and then shyly: 'Do you think Lord Shelford will win the Hunt Point to Point on Monday?'

'My dear child, how can I tell? I'm sure I hope so; it's very plucky of him to ride at his age, and he's a heavy man, too.'

'He's not stout,' said Margaret quickly, and Lady Victoria felt she must walk warily.

'I only mean there's more credit to him and his horse if he does win, my dear. What's he riding?'

'His Lordship,' answered the girl. 'Stokes says he's in the finest possible condition.'

'By Red Earl out of Quality Girl,' remarked her companion. 'I remember he bought him from us. I wonder he's up to the weight.'

'Is Lord Shelford a good rider—I mean among good riders like Lord Middlesex?'

Lady Victoria shook her head. 'No, bold and bad I should say, but that sort often has wonderful luck. And Lord Shelford is one of the luckiest men I've ever known. He has succeeded in everything he has put his hand to.'

‘ But isn’t that due to something more than luck ? ’ asked Margaret.

‘ Of course it is,’ answered Lady Victoria ; ‘ he has thoroughly earned his laurels, but plenty of unsuccessful people are deserving of success and it passes them by. Lord Shelford has a great deal of worldly wisdom ; he knows what he wants, he doesn’t place his aims inconveniently high, and he concentrates to the exclusion of side issues.’

Margaret did not entirely like this speech, but she did not quite see how to resent it. Her friend went on.

‘ I always feel that Shelford has got the very last half ounce out of himself ; he could not have succeeded more than he has. That’s a great deal to say of a man, but, of course, it cuts both ways, like everything else.’

‘ What do you mean ? ’ asked the girl.

‘ Well,’ said Lady Victoria, ‘ a man’s success is not necessarily in proportion to the value of his work to his own soul. When Lord Shelford left Oxford he threw up unremunerative but first-rate work. He must have always been ambitious for political distinction, and he made a fortune with great quickness in the City, and then had the self-control to realise that he had enough, with the various affairs he is still interested in, to enable him to leave active business life and to devote himself exclusively to his political future. How well he has done you can see and judge for yourself. He had a brilliant career in the Commons, and took the Peerage when Ministerial work pressed on him.’

‘ But one thing,’ asked Margaret, ‘ why did he refuse the Viceroyalty ? ’

‘ That was his greatest piece of wisdom,’ said her companion. ‘ His special knowledge of Indian affairs pointed him out for the India Office, but at that time the Prime Minister was pledged to a programme which Lord Shelford could not support. The Prime Minister offered him the Viceroyalty which he refused because he knew he was not the man to carry that off. Frankly he is not *grand seigneur* enough.’ Margaret started, but did not speak. ‘ He would never have been thought of if he had not been such a scholar. He has the charm of the student without the pedantry of the schoolman. But, even so, he could not have carried off that particular position, and he knew it. When he refused, he showed his complete detachment from prejudice, even where he himself was concerned. He did the Government yeoman service from the back benches during the rest of that short Parliament ; then the Opposition came in, and their majority was so narrow they didn’t last two years, and when the present Government returned to power Lord Shelford was able to make his own terms. Oh yes, he managed very well.’

Margaret turned an angry face to Lady Victoria. ‘ Why do you seem to grudge him all that is due to him ? ’ she said indignantly. ‘ You don’t really like him.’

Lady Victoria burnt her boats. ‘ No, Margaret,

I don't,' she said quietly. 'To me there is something that jars in him ; it is difficult to define, but it permeates his whole life, although I am bound to say that he is a charming person who fascinates me. But his standard of values is not as high as it should be—I mean that I don't think he looks at life with the same eyes as, say, my brother does.'

'But you say,' said Margaret, 'that he would not join a Cabinet which was pledged to causes that he could not support. Surely that's noble ; and then he refused that greatest prize, the Vice-royalty.'

'I hardly know how to put it, child, but I don't think that any of it was entirely from the highest motives. "Honesty is the best policy" is not the noblest point of view, but it's a very worldly wise one. I hate to say all this of my brother's colleague and my host, but there seems no married woman to tell you where you are drifting.'

'What do you mean?' said Margaret hotly.

'My dear,' said the older woman gently, 'bear with my blundering words a little. You have come to the parting of the ways ; you must choose your life now, almost at once. Lord Shelford wishes, I am sure, to make you his wife. He can offer you much—very much. Let us think of that first. I believe he loves you devotedly in his way. I think he would be good to you. Wealth, distinction, power, he can give you ; intellectual companionship far above your own level, and the loyal devotion of his last years. No woman has

the right to ask for a man's past, but Lord Shelford's has not been such as to make a very handsome wedding present to his second wife. His first was a very unhappy woman.'

'He is a good and noble man,' said Margaret hotly, 'and I am proud to be cared for by him.'

'Yes, my dear, it is a wonderful experience for any young girl, for he is a most remarkable man, but there are different values of goodness as there are of everything else. Lord Shelford's public position requires a certain standard of life, and he is old and has lived through much, and again you see "Honesty is the best policy." Lord Shelford at sixty-four does not desire to repeat all the experiences of his earlier life. But let us look at the other side of the contract. What have you to give him unless it is absolute devotion?' Margaret started and looked away, and her companion continued: 'Of course, he would like an heir to the peerage, and that would justify his marriage to the world; but you can't count on the future. What have you to offer him? Have you love and trust enough to join hands with him if he were a failure at his age? Are you being quite honest, in your turn, with both yourself and him? I think not. I think you are capable of being above him, and are actually below him; below his generosity to you and his trust in you, below his unselfishness—for it does mean unselfishness when a man of that age is ready to

remould all his life. Now Shelford—in spite of flaws—is a man, and a man of great capacity ; he will not be satisfied with your second best, nor is there any reason why he should. And, Margaret, he will not fail, if you do give him your second best, to recognise it as such. Don't think you can deceive him ; your dutiful attendance when he is ill is not all he wants. He will have a right to expect that he, and not his position merely, should fill your life. Think if he has a stroke—not an unlikely thing—and endures for years a half-life ; are you going to love him so that his anxieties will be laid to rest, or will that suspicious mind be tortured with fears that you regret your marriage, or even that you are looking for consolation to some one of your own age ? ’

She paused, and Margaret said : ‘ Oh I suppose if one looked long enough at frightening possibilities, anyone could put a girl off any marriage.’

‘ Margaret, Margaret,’ exclaimed Lady Victoria, ‘ be honest with yourself, if you still can be. I don't wish to frighten you off this marriage if your heart and not your vanity is at the bottom of it. But have you thought enough of other people ? Have you considered Elizabeth Shelford much ? Of course she has agreed to this project of her father's, he could not fight her over it ; but she stands to lose her home and position if you take him ; although that ought not to weigh if you and Shelford were necessary to your best selves, it enters into the case when it is a question of material

give and take, and not of an ideal union. And it can't be an ideal marriage: nothing first-rate can be had without its costing the full price, and I have shown you that you take very much and pay very little in this contract. You could not be satisfied permanently with that. Bear with me while I say a word of myself. When I was young I loved a poor man with brilliant capacities and powers of mind; he had a love of truth—intellectual honesty—such as I have never known elsewhere. My people thought, very naturally, that it was a bad marriage for me, but I knew what I wanted. I needed to be his; my nature cried out for him. "We live by admiration, hope and love," and I realised that he was above me, but I knew that he could raise me. Margaret, love may come where there is already respect, but where there are only sentiments which we mistake for love, respect does not easily follow, and even the attachments which we have may leave us cold and stranded. I looked forward to sharing the struggles of the man I loved, whether I ever shared his successes or not; I asked to put any advantages which I might possess, and which he might lack, into the joint concern; I asked to join hands with my mate.'

Margaret was looking at Lady Victoria now: she saw the plain face of her friend illumined as from within. Her voice had a triumphant ring that did not tell of sorrow or loss. The woman paused, but the girl did not speak.

'Well, my people were awfully good to me;

they said with truth that I was old enough to know my mind, we were allowed to become engaged, and at Christmas we were to be married. Then you know came all our tragedy. That summer my father and mother were staying in Switzerland; they had dear Isabel Dormer with them. A very violent kind of typhoid fever broke out, and they and half the hotel guests were swept away before we realised the danger. Archie was still at Oxford and I was waiting to come out with him—you know our other brother, the father of Hugo and Denis, was years younger than Archie; he was a mere child then. Trains were slower in those days, and formalities were very difficult to overcome. We had an awful time when we did get out. Well, you see Archie succeeded at twenty-one, a heart-broken boy, for although he was too young for an engagement, he had loved Isabel and she him. I think they would have married early, though she was only eighteen; both of them were old for their age. But he had an awful breakdown, brain fever and months of misery.' Lady Victoria paused again.

'And you?' asked the listener.

'I stayed with Archie, my dear,' said Lady Victoria simply. 'I delayed my marriage, and after nursing him back to life, I lingered on; you see he was not so strong a character as the man I loved; he missed our parents, who were quite young, at every turn. Of course everyone thought I stayed on to be the head of Archie's table, everyone, that is, except the one who mattered. He never

doubted me ; no, you needn't pity me ; misunderstanding never could or did come between us. But he died abroad before I felt free to leave Archie ; he wasn't very strong and he never spared himself. Perhaps I did wrong in putting off our marriage ; to this day I am not sure. Yet my life has not been spoilt by sorrow, but enriched by love. I don't find things grey, and I am a very happy person. Do not let us speak of it again ; I wish that your mother were here, she could put things so much better before you. People said she made a bad marriage ; if trust that is radiant and joy that is serene are tokens of it, then hers is a bad marriage.'

Lady Victoria paused again, but Margaret was too much moved to speak.

' You have seen very little of your mother ; if your grandmother had not been living she would have left your father and come to you, of course. But as it is, take this from me. Don't ever venture to compassionate your mother, Margaret, for her poverty, her exile or anxieties—"for your joy no man taketh from you,"' added Lady Victoria in a low voice. When she spoke again her tone was as brisk as usual. ' Now don't go and insult Roger Bamfield by taking him as an act of renunciation ; as far as you've got at present he's a deal too good for you.' The mischievous way in which Lady Victoria looked up at Margaret disarmed the girl's susceptibilities. " Thank Heaven, fasting, for a good man's love." If you ever do take him, poor fellow, realise your own inferiority and be quite sure

you want the best, or leave him alone. And things are very inconsistent. Let me try and be honest myself, as I'm recommending you to be so. If you marry Shelford I shall see much more of you and treat you very nicely ; but I shan't think the same of you. If you marry Bamfield I shan't have time to come often to the rather cheap part of London where you'll have to live, and you will gradually drop out of our set where money is part of the atmosphere. But I shall respect you.' Again Lady Victoria's voice dropped as she said half to herself : ' " Mais je lui serrerais bien volontiers la main. " ' Then aloud : ' One has ultimately to pay the full price whether one is willing or not, and to realise that one can't have things both ways. Pleasure is not happiness, but neither is happiness pleasure. It's a hard time for you, my child. Youth is a woman's hardest time, because she has to decide early on which side she will range herself. But, in compensation, we have more courage in youth. Of course, if you take Bamfield, no one will realise that you turned your back on the pride of life. But it's some innocent food for one's vanity to feel that one refused the man who refused the Vice-royalty when one is presented in society to small dignitaries. I remember once going to a political meeting in London. It was at eight o'clock and I went, of course, in a high frock. I was in mourning at the time, so I wasn't asked to a big dinner first, and most of our set were in evening dress. In those days one wore brocade petticoats. I remember saying

to myself, "I'm sure my skirt is as good as any of theirs," and deriving a sort of inferior satisfaction from it. You see, one can't live at concert pitch all the time. If you don't take Shelford you will have that secret self-satisfaction. But be sure always that it is the lesser thing you've left, and the bigger thing you've taken, if you marry Bamfield. Be sincere with your standard of values. Here we are at home; thank you for listening to me so patiently, my dear. We old people are incorrigible in taking liberties with you young ones. Forgive me for anything hurtful I have said.' She turned full to Margaret and held out her hand. For all answer the girl pressed her burning face upon it.

Lady Victoria was not deceived by Margaret's loyalty to Shelford. Although the child spoke no word that admitted he could be wrong, and resented Lady Victoria's suggestions against him, the older woman saw that the hour had struck, and that Margaret Hurst would never be content with an easy second best. Whether she had really helped she did not know; she was inclined to think that Margaret was capable of considerable things without assistance, but that she was sadly in need of a woman's affection.

CHAPTER XIX

MARGARET FINDS HER HEART

THAT Saturday evening Lady Victoria sat long in her bedroom before she could sleep. She seldom spoke of her story, and when she did, she suffered. But from long experience she had learnt how to deal with herself; years ago she had disciplined her mind, 'weaned her young heart from sorrow and despair,' and from bitterness also, which is a far rarer achievement. She longed to know whether she had helped or hindered Margaret; since their talk she had rather kept out of the girl's way, and had no clue to her state of mind. If she could have looked into Margaret's room, she would have been reassured, for though slowly, unwillingly almost, Margaret was taking the first steps along the path of self-knowledge; she did not turn back, but walked firmly and proudly up that road which is at the same time the most and the least lonely that we ever have to tread.

Scraps of Lady Victoria's talk seemed to beat over and over again in her brain—"Pleasure is not happiness, but neither is happiness pleasure." What side do I want to range myself on? Have

I even any choice? Have I not driven Roger away so that I have already virtually made my choice? "Be sincere with your standard of values." If Lord Shelford wants me, surely I can work out my own salvation in trying to make him a good wife. "Nothing first-rate can be had without its costing the full price." Do I care for Roger more than for pomps and vanities? "Love may come where there is already respect; but if we have only attachments which we mistake for love, they are apt to leave us stranded." How can I tell what is love? "Be sincere with your own standard of values." But if I deliberately choose the lesser love and faithfully make it sufficient, what then? But can I? "Let us look at the other side of the contract. What have you to give him? You can't deceive him." No, and I don't want to. I must not cheat either him or myself. Does he love me as Roger does? Am I as needful to him as to Roger? No. Do I love him? Yes. I *do* love Lord Shelford, but not as I should. I don't care enough to give him the whole, and I care too much to give him a part. "God Who knowest our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking"—I want to think last of myself in this thing. For I do care for Lord Shelford; I care so much that it teaches me that it isn't enough. No one would ever believe how much I cared; he himself won't ever know. I wonder whether he would ever quite believe me disinterested if I did take him? I am confused

now, but I can still feel, even if I can't think or pray. He and Roger are not in the same camp; Roger is the kind of whom saints and heroes are made, who can "resist unto blood." But Lord Shelford is still too good to be taken as a second best, and *I* am too good to take him or anyone in that way. I wonder what real Christians feel, not just people like me who call themselves Christians? Do they feel tremendously humble or tremendously exalted when they think of what this week commemorates? Did Christ really die; and if so, was He alone—alone with all our sins? Shall I betray Him again if I fall below the best I see? Will He give me a sign? "They have Moses and the Prophets." Am I perhaps alone after all; and when I think He helps me, is it only a response of my own to a demand of my own? If He isn't there at all, and no one cares? Well, I needn't be a liar or a coward or a cheat. And, perhaps life won't always be so difficult, Lady Victoria said it was hardest when one was young. I'm so tired, all of me, body and soul.' And the poor child, her whole being shaken, lay down with the old cry, 'Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief.'

Margaret and Lady Victoria were the only members of the Mallow party who were at the early service. They did not sit together, nor meet until they were going home; Margaret had come in a little late, and Lady Victoria's heart smote her as she noticed the circles round the girl's eyes. It was a perfect April morning, the

kind of day when England seems as if she were consciously justifying herself to her children.

‘ You look tired, my child, and to-morrow’s a hard day. One always feels the excitement of a race, and it’s a long drive there and back. Don’t come to church again to-day, take a book into the garden and have a good rest.’

‘ I’d rather come, thank you,’ said Margaret ; ‘ I love to hear Lord Shelford read the lessons, he brings out the meaning to me.’ Though she was not aware of it, there was a wistful note in her voice which told her companion that the girl was already facing a future which did not number many Sundays at Mallow.

Lady Victoria changed the subject. She loved Margaret, but she was one of those rare women who are always on their guard lest they should make love an excuse for want of delicacy in their treatment of the beloved one. She felt she had taken liberties with Margaret that were justified only by the girl’s singular loneliness, not by her, Lady Victoria’s, fitness, for the post of counsellor. And Margaret was grateful to her, without understanding why, when she said as they reached the house : ‘ I do wish we hadn’t quite so long to wait for breakfast. I’m starving, and it’s only just after nine ; we shall get nothing until a quarter to ten. I wish I was one of the people who could order something in the dining-room, but I’m not. I can’t even order relations’ servants about, but lots of people are quite calm about it. Let’s go in

and get the letters,' and Margaret followed her, laughing.

Quite a small party came out of church after the sermon—only Lady Victoria, Mr. Brough, Lord Shelford, and Margaret. The others either had not gone to church at all or were staying on.

The four started to walk together, when Lord Shelford said to Margaret: 'Do you mind coming rather a longer way? I want to inquire at one of the cottages for a poor fellow who's down with pneumonia, a bad case I'm afraid.'

Margaret gladly agreed, and the two turned away. Margaret found afterwards that she remembered every step of that walk, though at the time she did not feel aware of anything except her companion. Shelford was looking well, his step was buoyant, and there was an eager look in his eyes.

'When we've done the inquiring, I want to see Stokes about "His Lordship." Would you care to come too?'

'You know I should love to,' said Margaret; 'and oh, I am so anxious about the race!'

'Do you know child, I don't think I should ride if you weren't here to see me? I haven't bothered about it for several years, but now I don't want the young fellows to have it all their own way. I mean you to see there's something left of a man after sixty, Margaret.'

He paused, and all the answer the girl could make was: 'Oh, I do hope you'll win, I do so want you to!'

Lord Shelford said, half to himself: 'Yes, I hope I shall win. Margaret, after the race, I shall have a question to ask you. But before I ask it, let us make a compact, you and I. Let us agree that whatever your answer is, it shall make no difference to our friendship. I have set mighty store by that friendship, and there is only one thing that could console me for its loss. My dear, as one gets older, in some ways one sees clearer. And this old man would never forgive himself if he distressed his little friend. So, if you can't give the answer I want to my question, let us still be very special friends. Will you promise?'

'I will promise,' answered Margaret, her eyes shining through tears.

'Then let us shake hands upon it,' said Lord Shelford cheerfully, and he took his hat off as if to feel the breeze. Margaret put her hand in his. For the second and last time Viscount Shelford kissed it, standing bareheaded by the girl he loved, with all the glory of an English spring around them. And Margaret still keeps the glove.

The rest of that Easter Sunday seemed like a dream to the girl. The luncheon was so thoroughly an anti-climax to her morning that in her state of tension she giggled helplessly. Mr. Perrin, who was what he called a judge of cooking and what Lady Victoria called innocently greedy, suddenly addressed his hostess.

'Do you know,' he said solemnly, 'that, except

at our club, nearly all the small birds you see at London dinners are really mice ? ’

‘ Oh,’ exclaimed Lady Templeton, almost in a mouse’s squeak herself, ‘ how horrid ! I’m so dreadfully afraid of them. I mean,’ catching her august husband’s reproving eye, ‘ I used to be, I’m getting quite fond of them now.’

‘ I never heard of anyone, except the prisoner of fiction, who was fond of mice, exactly,’ said Lord Shelford with a wicked look at Margaret, which nearly made the poor girl hysterical.

Just then a happy diversion was made by the voice of Mr. Perrin, by this time portentously solemn, enunciating the dictum ‘ A day without a salad is a day lost.’

‘ Have some more of this one,’ said Elizabeth hastily ; ‘ at any rate it’s fresh.’

‘ If you would like to know a few unusual salads, Miss Shelford,’ pursued Mr. Perrin, ‘ I can give you some recipes that I think you would find helpful.’

Elizabeth’s murmured thanks were broken in upon by the unabashed voice of Lawrence Hyde.

‘ Do take me round the garden, Miss Shelford, not the vegetables, just we two. I tried to catch you in the rose walk last evening, but all the other men were there. You had no hat on, and though, I despise the classics, I couldn’t help thinking you were surrounded like Circe.’

A general shout of laughter, which served to

fill up the cup of Lady Templeton's mystification, greeted this kindly reference to a worn-out literature.

And so it seemed to Margaret the day dragged on, a motley medley shifting before her eyes. Lord Shelford was in the highest spirits ; ever since the day he had shown Margaret his personal relics in Bryanston Square, he had felt almost certain that she could not resist him, and pretty confident that she did not wish to. He was working seriously at the Indian difficulty with his friends for part of each day ; for the rest he seemed like a boy out of school. The excitement of the coming race helped to make him an even more dominant personality than usual.

In the afternoon everyone went to see the horses, and while Lord Middlesex talked with the stud-groom aside, the rest of the house-party made the usual effect of people endeavouring to conceal their ignorance.

'That's a horse,' said Sir Nigel with decision, eyeing 'His Lordship' critically.

'That's a sound intellect for a crisis,' whispered Mr. Perrin to Lady Victoria ; 'we know how the Empire's governed now.'

Lord Middlesex left Stokes and went up to the horse. He patted him gently and said : 'You are a nice friendly fellow,' passing his hand over his ears.

'What's he doing that for ?' asked Mrs. Brough of her husband. Receiving no reply, she said :

‘ I wish you’d say something horsey ; I thought you knew about stables.’

Mr. Brough made an effort. ‘ Er—Lord Middlesex, what—what’s he out of ? You know all about him, don’t you ? ’

‘ Well,’ said Lord Middlesex pleasantly, ‘ he’s not out of condition, we may trust Stokes for that.’

Lord Shelford was standing near his daughter and Lady Victoria. ‘ I hope,’ said the latter, ‘ that Archie won’t do too much of that sort of thing ; I shall knit him a crossover one of these days.’

‘ And to think,’ said Lord Shelford, ‘ that I don’t know anyone more capable of taking the skin off than your brother.’

Lady Victoria’s eyes twinkled. ‘ Or one who has greater enjoyment in doing the job neatly and thoroughly,’ she added.

At last Margaret escaped to her room, leaving most of the party on the lawn, each explaining that they had themselves, or knew a friend who had, the largest known specimen of some kind of tree. The peculiarity of the situation was that no one listened to a word of anyone else’s, and that, as far as Margaret could judge, each person might have been indulging in a solitary monologue.

The girl sat holding her aching head in her hands, the fingers pressed against the throbbing temples. She was in a state of great mental

excitement ; she could feel, but not think. Suddenly she rose and began to pace up and down the room. It seemed to her that she had found a way in which she could be true to everyone, and hurt no one but herself. She would write a note to Lord Shelford—now, to-day—telling him that she was in love with Roger. That would save his asking the question. But she would not give it to him until after the point-to-point ; he should have it in time to stop his interview with her, but not before the race, when he had so much to think of. Yes, that would be best. And if Roger never asked her again—well, she must risk that ; she did not deserve that he should. She drew in her breath sharply. It seemed to her as if never before had she really faced the possibility of Roger ceasing to be in her life—as though she had never formed a picture of the future in which he had no existence. Somehow he had always been there, ready for her to fall back on. She stood by the window looking on to the trees with eyes that saw nothing. Was it necessary, this thing she was going to do ? Must she stop Lord Shelford's proposal by a confession of love for another—a man who perhaps no longer wanted her for his wife ? Yes. She did not see any other way. This would save Lord Shelford's pride, he should never have to bear a refusal from her. Did she also feel that it saved her from herself ? Had she an unacknowledged fear that if they had been face to face she could have denied him nothing ?

And did she know, deep in her heart, that by a marriage with him she would be false to herself and to Roger, but most of all to Lord Shelford? She could not have explained, even to herself, what made her sit down to her writing-table; but when, after many fruitless attempts, her letter was done, she felt a sense not only of peace but of freedom.

‘ Mallow, Easter Day.

‘ MY DEAR LORD SHELFORD,—You have been so good to me, in so many ways, and helped me in so many difficulties, that I want to tell you something that touches me nearly, before anyone else knows it. But first I want to thank you with my whole heart for all that you have done for me, all that you have been to me, all that you have taught me in my loneliness. I hope and believe that you have set your seal on all my life. I know that while I live I shall bless and honour you, and try to be a little worthy of the friendship you have shown me. Please never forget this.

‘ Last year Roger Bamfield asked me to marry him, and I refused. But I find now that I care for him, or rather I find that it is hard to do without him. Whether he will ever ask me again, I don’t know, but I want to tell *you*, and no one else, because if I hide my secret it comes between us, and if I tell it you, I am sure it won’t. I have only just

learnt it myself. Will you say "God bless you" to me, as I do to you?

‘ Ever your grateful

‘ MARGARET.’

A poor little composition, but a genuine effort that cost the writer many heartaches and tears. After all, she felt that it was her own doing, and not Lady Victoria's, that she had written the letter. Lord Shelford had taught her much, he had brought out her latent powers. There was a pathetic irony in the fact that he had helped her, unconsciously to either of them, to throw off his yoke.

CHAPTER XX

ALSO RAN—‘ HIS LORDSHIP ’

MONDAY’S weather was worthy of the preceding days ; the sun was brighter, though the wind was sharper.

‘ It will be cold watching the racing,’ said Miss Shelford. ‘ The coach is at the top of the hill ; we shall want plenty of wraps.’

There was a sense of flurry that morning, but the gentlemen got an hour for the Indian problem, and the ladies made various excursions into the stables until Stokes’s patience began to show signs of wearing thin. Even Elizabeth’s philosophic calm gave way to something like excitement, and her usually rather prim manner was abandoned for what Lady Victoria called to Margaret ‘ a watered-down imitation of mine.’

There was the usual packing of vehicles to take the guests to the course ; servants and hampers had been sent off in good time. Shelford and Lord Middlesex went first together in a dog-cart, the latter driving his host. Margaret found herself in a motor with Lady Templeton, Mrs Brough, and Mrs. Perrin ; they had all so much pressed

Miss Shelford to go in the closed motor that there had been no difficulty in discovering their preference. Elizabeth herself had gone in the open car with the husbands and Lady Victoria ; to everyone's relief Lawrence Hyde had announced that he should have a long day of self-communion, as no rational being could take an interest in seeing which horse could run fastest.

When they got to the coach it was certainly cold. The vehicle also looked high, and Lady Templeton, who was a little over-dressed for the occasion, glanced up in apprehension. The two cars had arrived almost together, and the little crowd stood for a moment considering whether the list of impedimenta was complete.

'I thought you had my field-glasses, Alice,' said Mr. Brough.

'I never even saw them,' began his wife indignantly, when Lord Middlesex said, 'Anyone is welcome to mine ; I shan't want them to-day.'

'Shall you want to go and see Lord Shelford after the weighing-in ? I mean, shall you be getting up and down often ?' asked Lady Victoria of Lady Templeton.

'Oh no,' announced the poor victim of fashion, as she glanced down at her gown and up at her seat.

Lady Victoria put her foot on the first step, pretending to feel embarrassed by her own sensible tailor-made.

'I feel like a hobbled donkey and then I'm

told to be thankful for freedom and absence of weight,' she announced loudly. 'The only thing that passes the folly my sex will say, is the folly they will believe.'

She settled herself aloft, and then said sharply. 'No, Archie, don't haul Lady Templeton like that. Give her a steady hand, and let her pull if she wants.'

Only this fearless and timely advice saved a catastrophe of tearing.

When they were all settled, Lord Middlesex turned to Margaret.

'Shall I take you and Miss Shelford down during the farmers' heavy-weight? Then you can see Lord Shelford in the paddock.'

'Oh, thank you, I do so want to see him up to the last.'

'Well, we must get back in time to see the start; but I'll give you plenty of notice, and you needn't worry.'

'Where is Mr. Hyde?' asked Lady Templeton, who had had breakfast in her room and missed his confession of faith.

'Making up elaborate impromptus for dinner-table use,' replied Lady Victoria. 'He always reminds me of the lady who wanted to meet Napoleon.'

'What lady?' asked Lady Templeton incautiously.

'Well, she was a blue-stocking, and wanted to impress the Emperor. So she prepared a brilliant

reply to everything he was likely to say to her. Unfortunately, at that moment, the future of his country's race was uppermost in Napoleon's mind. He felt she had only one claim to interest him, so he said, "Madame, on me dit que vous nourrissez vos enfants vous-même." "

There was a general laugh, and Lady Victoria finished cheerfully: 'Bonaparte would have made short work of Lawrence, who wouldn't have had even that claim on his interest.'

Margaret was feeling better than she had done for some days. In spite of her tears in bed, she had slept well; youth deserves some compensations for the acuteness of its sorrows. The fresh air and excitement brought colour to her cheeks and brightness to her eyes; the knowledge that her letter was by now on Lord Shelford's study table brought peace to her heart. For, however badly she had expressed herself, she had saved the friend she honoured from a refusal at her hands, or from an unworthy acceptance. She looked both lovely and lovable as she sat behind beautiful Lady Templeton and handsome Mrs. Brough.

The usual crowd of neighbours and friends came round the Mallow party, and there were many hopes for Lord Shelford's success. Margaret tried steadily not to feel the worldly side of what she had given up; she focused her mind as well as she could on her secret pride that it was for her that Lord Shelford was riding. As she looked at the course, she thought of Ascot; the memory

of his anger was there, but it was robbed of its sting. Once or twice Lord Middlesex made her aware that he was mindful of her. The brother and sister, with their distinguished, ugly faces and bright eyes—the only restless thing about them was the quick glance of their hazel eyes—had grown very dear to her.

The early races contained no interest for Margaret and she let Sir Nigel instruct her in the various forms of religion practised by the Indian natives, with praiseworthy submission.

'Do look at Templeton boring that poor girl by what he calls unbending to her,' said Mr. Perrin; 'I shall cut in and save her.'

But just then Lord Middlesex got up and said: 'It's time to go down if we are to see Shelford and get back for the start.'

The men all scrambled down, followed by Elizabeth, Margaret, and Lady Victoria. The other ladies remained, and Margaret remembered afterwards the calm superiority of Mrs. Perrin's expression.

Lady Victoria seized her brother's arm.

'Archie, that woman looks as if we were insects,' she exclaimed.

'No, only as if we were children going to feed the bears,' he answered.

'Well, I'm sure she'd like to feed the bears with *us*, anyhow. She is insufferable.'

Her tone changed.

'Look at that child, Archie; it makes one's heart bleed. But she oughtn't to marry him,

ought she? He's sixty-four at the least, not to touch on other reasons.'

'No,' answered Lord Middlesex gravely. 'No. She certainly ought not to marry Shelford, nor do I think that she will.'

They had reached the paddock, and Margaret stood beside the horse which was held by his owner.

Lord Shelford probably had never looked handsomer than he did at that moment. He had that gallant bearing which always sits best upon a man in later life. His straight features showed little signs of age; the heavy black eyebrows shaded his dark piercing eyes, which looked at the girl with a confident gaze. He seemed taller than usual in his hunting hat among the men who were not riding, although in reality he barely reached six feet; the pink coat showed his clear pallor to advantage.

Lady Victoria thought, as she looked at the two, that her own brother, with his grizzled moustache, looked older than Shelford, with his clean-shaven, powerful jaw; yet Vincent was five years the younger.

Man and horse and girl made a brave picture of the pride of life and the lust of the eye. 'His Lordship's' bay coat shone in the sun, his black points giving a richness to the colouring. Margaret wore a white serge coat and skirt with touches of black, and a black and white hat with quills in it.

'I kiss my hand to you, Margaret,' laughed

Shelford, 'for fear you should prove a magpie and bring me bad luck.'

'But I've only got black points like "His Lordship,"' she answered, and she kissed the horse's neck.

'Don't make him above himself, or we don't know what will happen.'

He lowered his voice. 'My little friend, you know why I am riding. When I'm home, we'll have our talk. It makes me so happy to have you with me, Margaret. Do you know?'

'Dear Lord Shelford, you are so very, very good to me. I'm not a bit worth all your kindness.'

'Take her away, Middlesex, or she won't see the start,' and Shelford swung himself into the saddle.

Margaret turned back and held out her hand.

'The best of luck; you know how much I care,' she said, and her eyes looked very straight into his.

Lord Shelford took her hand.

'Bless you, my dear. You have brought a lot of happiness into my life. Always friends. Don't forget our compact.'

He raised his hat, and turned his horse, and with a last look Margaret ran to where Lord Middlesex stood waiting for her.

'How splendid he looks. Will he win?'

Vincent shook his head.

'I don't think so, the horse has got a big weight on him; both Stokes and I tried to persuade him not to ride. But one can never tell, you know.'

'Hurry up now, Miss Margaret, or we shall be late.' He had watched her look back, yet he had a strong conviction that, whether his colleague won this race or not, he would not win his big event.

Lord Middlesex put Elizabeth and his sister on the box seat, standing himself at the far side of them. The other ladies were on the higher bench behind, and the men farther back and standing up. The course was visible nearly the whole way, and the lie of the country afforded a typical English scene. Margaret was immediately behind Lord Middlesex, and followed his example in standing up, as she interfered with no one's view. The seats were at right angles to the course, and at the side of the coach nearest to her she noticed some catkins, and wondered vaguely if there were also some among the trees in a little spinney across the valley on the other side. Somehow she took a dislike to catkins, and she has it still.

The usual difficulties of the start were overcome, and the field moved at first like a compact mass, and then gradually streamed out. Margaret thought how very slowly they were going until she heard Lord Middlesex say, 'You've got some pace in your hunt, Miss Shelford.'

Margaret was looking carefully and was watching the horses take the first fence. It was too far off for her inexperienced eyes to tell which was Lord Shelford.

'Can you see him?' she asked, and Lord Middlesex answered, 'Yes, he's in that first bunch. Can

you see three or four a little in front, and then six or seven, and two quite behind? Well, Lord Shelford is third. Take this.' And he offered her his glasses, which he had quietly picked up when he discovered that the Brougs had no use for them.

Margaret shook her head. She did not doubt that Lord Middlesex was right, but she could not pretend to see herself.

Just then a horse fell at a jump, and though his rider had kept hold of his bridle, when he mounted again he was hopelessly behind.

'One competitor the less,' said Lord Middlesex cheerfully.

But Margaret thought he did not look so cheerful as he sounded.

'Is he still well forward?' she asked.

'Yes,' said Lord Middlesex. 'He's pressing his horse a bit soon.'

They watched in silence, and then, 'Can you still see Lord Shelford?' she asked, and received a nod in reply.

The horses were coming nearer now, and Margaret was almost sure she could recognise her friend. She turned away to rest her eyes and then looked back and saw that another horse had come down. He was getting slowly to his feet again, leaving his rider on the ground. She felt a quick movement near her, and then was aware that Lord Middlesex had put his hand over Elizabeth's eyes. She looked at the rider, waiting for him to rise, but he made

no movement. People gathered round him ; she could no longer see him. Then the little crowd split up, a hurdle was brought ; she saw him again. Suddenly she understood. That awful stillness in that strained position told the tale plainly. Thomas Shelford had ridden his last race full of confidence in a happy future ; he lay there with a broken neck in view of the girl he had loved. ‘ Also ran—“ His Lordship.” ’

CHAPTER XXI

ELIZABETH IS STILL LOYAL

EVERYONE had reason to be grateful to the Vincents that day. Lady Victoria brought Elizabeth and Margaret home in the closed car ; her brother had a still sadder task.

Margaret felt that she had lost all control of her thoughts as she faced Lady Victoria in the car ; she saw how even her special friend thought less of her than of Elizabeth, and an utterly unreasonable resentment welled up in her heart that no one would realise her right to mourn. True, she had never had that right—had abandoned even the prospect of it, but nevertheless the bitterness of an unacknowledged loss laid hold upon her. Then something in Lady Victoria's face, as she pulled the rug more round Elizabeth and drew down the blind over the window nearest to her, roused the girl's indignation. How dared she, who had never liked him, never been commonly just to him, pretend to care for his daughter in this awful hour ? Who was Lady Victoria that she should be with them then ? At any rate Elizabeth was his child, and blood is thicker than water ; poor Margaret's

heart went out to the impassive figure sitting perfectly still—even the folded hands were motionless. The heavy black eyebrows at that moment seemed to Margaret more like Lord Shelford's than ever, but how poor a likeness the daughter's face bore to the father's! Suddenly, as if she had only just heard it, the fact of his death came upon Margaret, and with it rushed to her mind the other cruel fact that he had met that death by riding to please her.

Lady Victoria, turning to see how near they were to Mallow, noticed the white, frozen look on the girl's face; she opened the window a little, hoping that Margaret felt faint, but in reality she knew that it was something far less merciful than faintness which brought that stricken gaze to the widely opened eyes. Margaret's soul had grasped it now; he was dead; she could never do anything for him again—never show him what he was to her. She had killed him, and she had not even been true to him. She had written to tell him she did not love him; she had had the letter put on his table while he was riding to please her—Lord Shelford riding to his death to please Margaret Hurst!

Curiously the knowledge that he had never had the letter was at first no comfort to her; she scorned herself the more for being an undetected traitor. She had gone through such mental excitement and emotion, such real experience of life, during the last days as her youth had not yet felt, and the strain of the past and the present seemed

almost unbearable. She was so little used to feeling any kind of bitterness, to dwelling on her own sentiments or analysing her moods, that she did not realise now that the aspect of this day's work could ever change for her. The time would come when she would see things very differently, when her heart would be full of thankfulness that she had brought so much joy into the life of her old friend. She would acknowledge that she had done well in writing that letter, that it was true and honest and worthy of them both ; but she would rejoice the more that fate had smiled on Lord Shelford to the last, and had kept him from the sadness of reading what she was bound to write ; that he had died as he would have wished, happy in the present and confident in the future. Moreover, she would realise that, much as she had received from him, she had also given him something in return. She would know that she had been more than a plaything to him, and that her unspoiled sweetness and sincerity had awakened in him the most disinterested passion of his life. That this had come to him so late and with so much force goes far to explain how it was that Lord Shelford had the friendship of better people than himself. He was capable of receiving impressions—and to some extent of responding to them—from a higher moral level than his own all his life through, and he was never more capable than at the end. His undoubted mental capacity made him diverge far less from truth than his natural bent inclined

him. He was not of those who deceive themselves. When he fell, as at times he did, below the standard accepted of less worthy men than he, he did so deliberately and of set purpose, because he could serve himself in no other way, or because he could minister to his pleasures without injuring his career. Lady Victoria's dictum, that he had 'got the last half-ounce out of himself,' was true, at any rate partially; to his ambition he had given unwavering allegiance and in its turn his ambition had not played him false. When he had what he had set out to get, he enjoyed it to the full. The luck that all his friends chaffed him about stayed with him indeed to the end. He died full of bodily vigour and mental power, with no time for regrets; the present had yielded to him all that he had asked, and he had no fear that the future would be less generous.

When the car reached Mallow, Lady Victoria was thankful to see that the news had arrived before them. She could not understand how it had reached the house already, but so it was, and her quick eyes saw the upstairs blinds being pulled down as the house came in sight. There was the proper demeanour of well-trained servants at the door, broken in upon by the genuine grief of Lord Shelford's own man, who came hurrying into the hall. He it was who had brought the news; he had gone over on his bicycle to the course, as keen as anyone to see his master ride. Lord Middlesex had bade him go back as hard

as he could to prepare the household, and to save Elizabeth from the pain of having the tale told before her.

The poor fellow's face was pitiful ; all Lord Shelford's servants were proud of their master, and many had been with him for years.

In the hall Elizabeth stood still, and looked about her steadily. She had not spoken in the car, except in bare reply to Lady Victoria's efforts for her comfort ; now her voice sounded harsh and hard, even to herself.

' Your brother and you will stay and help me, please,' she said, turning to Lady Victoria.

She hardly waited for the eager assurance of service which answered her.

' I shall want you, Margaret ; I shall send for you later ; there will be things you can do. But don't talk to me ; I want to keep quiet.'

She faced the servants ; there was a little knot of them together now.

' Whatever Lord Middlesex says is to be done, and his orders are as mine. I know you will all be anxious to help,' and she turned slowly to go upstairs.

' Mrs. Drew,' she said, looking back towards her old nurse, ' go, please, and wait for me in—his Lordship's room.'

There was a slight hesitation before the last words, but her voice did not tremble, and Lady Victoria, who had all the dislike of her class for emotion that was theatrical and for the public

indulgence of private feeling, paid a silent tribute to Elizabeth's self-control and simplicity.

And then began those pitiful incidents, half tragic and half comic, with which all who have seen their loved ones die are so painfully familiar. The considerate hush in the house—in the house that is mourning because some one has passed beyond the need for consideration; the petty clamorous details that drag back the mind when it is striving to follow the lost one beyond the present; the necessary attendance to the small affairs of life which jar on the nerves of those absorbed in the thought of death. It is hard to be grateful to the grotesque at such moments, but surely it serves to adjust the balance of our temperaments in some mysterious way which we cannot understand.

Lord Middlesex spared Elizabeth where it was wise, and with unerring instinct he also helped her to work. There was much to be done, many people to communicate with, a great deal to decide. Quietly and effectively Vincent arranged with the guests how and when they should go; he alone seemed just the same; his quiet, kind and rather colourless manner was only a shade gentler than usual. Yet Margaret surprised a very different mood in him as she unexpectedly saw him in the hall.

Lady Victoria, taking pity on the girl's misery and knowing that Elizabeth had nothing yet for her to do, had asked Margaret to go and get white flowers for five large vases, which were to go later into the chamber of death. It was some way to the

houses, and the repeated journeys consumed time and energy, and helped Margaret more than she knew. She was bringing back an armful of flowers to the inner hall, where she was arranging her vases, when Lord Middlesex came out from the library.

Lawrence Hyde was standing near the fire ; Lord Middlesex came up quickly.

‘ I have just got a message that you wish to see me ; I am busy writing, so please tell me what you want.’

‘ Oh, I say, you know, I’m awfully sorry and all that. I’ve only just come back, but what am I to do ? ’

‘ You will go with the Templetons by the 6.50 ; the car is ordered for them. The Perrins and Brouchs go by the 6.10 ; there won’t be room with them.’

‘ Oh, I see ; then I’ll get some one to pack for me.’

‘ No, you won’t,’ said Lord Middlesex ; ‘ my own man has gone up to town to help Lord Shelford’s with business matters ; messages are being sent in every direction, and there are no servants to spare. You will pack for yourself ; if necessary you could go without your things, but the car won’t go without you. Don’t fail, please ; be ready at half-past six.’

And Lord Middlesex, as Lawrence Hyde drifted silently away, looked so bland that he reminded Margaret, in spite of herself, of Lord Shelford’s words to Lady Victoria about her brother’s enjoyment in ‘ taking the skin off.’

Vincent gave the girl a friendly nod as he went back.

‘ I hope my sister and I will get off to-morrow ; it will be best for Miss Shelford to be alone with you.’

The hours went on, and it was nearly eight when Miss Shelford’s maid came to Margaret with a message from her mistress. Elizabeth was unable to see Margaret that night, or to come down ; she begged her to give Lord Middlesex and Lady Victoria dinner in her stead ; and she begged also that Margaret would wait for her before she went into his Lordship’s room, as she wished to take the girl herself to-morrow.

Margaret, of course, acquiesced, and, telling the maid to give her tender love to her mistress, she prepared for the usual dinner at a quarter past eight.

The two ladies, finding no one in the drawing-room, met Lord Middlesex coming from the direction of the dining-room. He held two telegrams in his hand.

‘ I don’t think we need trouble Miss Shelford about these to-night ; they can’t be answered until to-morrow. Lord Shelford’s man and mine will come down by the early train ; I shall have to see her in good time, and these can wait until then. What do you think, Victoria ? ’

‘ Oh, of course,’ said his sister wearily. ‘ When I left Elizabeth she looked as if nothing but tears would be of the least use to her, and that relief won’t come yet.’

‘ Let us come in to dinner,’ said Lord Middlesex ; and when they reached the dining-room the servants were moving quickly about instead of standing in their usual places. It flashed upon Margaret that Lord Middlesex had thought even of the dining-table, and that he had been in to have the places rearranged and had delayed his sister and her while it was done. The best of servants must remain with the limitations of their servitude ; no doubt they had prepared the head of the table, where some one always sat when Lord Shelford was absent, as for customary use. Margaret, as she sat between the brother and sister at the side of that hospitable board, felt deeper gratitude for the vacant place, more comfort in seeing his chair unoccupied, than such a detail warranted. She felt a little innocent pride that she herself had shed no tears ; she already felt used to the hot ache of her eyes and the dry feeling in her throat. But when she reached the room that Lord Shelford himself had prepared for her after her first visit to Mallow, which had been hers all through the happy autumn, speaking by his choice of books and pictures directly to her mind and heart, the double loss of his love for her and her’s for him came over her like a flood, and the merciful tears of youth had their way.

Elizabeth Shelford spent next morning at work with Lord Middlesex, but she came down to luncheon and sat in her usual seat opposite the empty place.

The Vincents left by the 6.10 ; the funeral was to be at Mallow, and both would return for

that day. Lord Middlesex had done everything in the house of mourning, from the arrangements for the special train and every detail of the funeral to the measures for the return of the dead man's seals of office ; he had spared Elizabeth the usual painful interviews ; he had thought and planned to save her ; he had reminded her of the things that needed attention, and kept from her those that were unnecessary.

At the last he came to her and said, ' Will you take me yourself into his room, Miss Shelford ? I haven't been to-day,' and perhaps nothing that he did for Elizabeth helped her more than that. She knew then that it was friendship for the father, not mere pity for the daughter, that had led Vincent to play his self-assigned part, and her sore heart was touched with gratitude not only for the services rendered to herself, but for the honour in which her dead father was held.

It was a comfort both to Elizabeth and to Margaret that the Vincents' places were not to be taken. There were very few relations, and those were coming only for the day of the funeral. Miss Shelford thought of Charles Waters with more kindness in his absence than at such a moment she could have felt in his presence. Just now, in spite of the real affection she felt for him, it would have jarred unspeakably on her nerves to have to share with him the burden that Lord Middlesex, in his unequivocal position as a simple friend, had so easily lifted from her shoulders. Many people

were coming for the funeral ; Elizabeth knew that an unseasonable thought would have found a place in many minds—would have been whispered by not a few tongues.

She turned to Margaret with genuine warmth. Here, at any rate, was something at which no one could scoff ; her father's disinterested love for this good and charming girl would have done his memory no harm, however many gossips had known it. She saw in the child the marks of a sorrow real as her own.

' Margaret, shall we come up together now ? I know you want to go, and I want to take you ; you have been very good to wait for me. I have had so much to do ; if those dear Vincents had not worked so hard I should still be settling details. How good they are ! '

The two women walked upstairs together.

' Lord Middlesex was particularly helpful to me about the Press ; I don't know how I could have managed that part without him ; we have always been careful in what we have authorised there. But, oh Margaret, how hard an important position makes some things ! I wanted to break it to Charles by two cables, one preparing him and the next telling the truth, but I couldn't.'

Elizabeth leant for a moment on the broad oak rail of the staircase on the half landing.

' Oh yes,' said Margaret, ' he deserved that, and it was like you to think of it.'

' But I couldn't,' answered Elizabeth sadly.

'Lord Middlesex said if Charles was to learn it privately from here, the bare fact must go immediately, otherwise the news would be up in every club in India. Poor, poor Charles, he has lost so much. Help me to think of him afterwards, Margaret; he really loved—my father.'

She paused outside Lord Shelford's door, opened it and entered, followed by Margaret.

For some time they stood, the two women who loved him best, gazing at the figure on the bed. The last time that Margaret had seen Lord Shelford was such a contrast in every way to this, that for a long space she failed to realise that the still, white form bore any relation to her friend. Lord Shelford's abundant vitality was one of his attractions in life; only yesterday it had been more striking even than usual as he stood in the paddock, the central note in a brilliantly coloured picture. Most people are partially alive, as it were; one of the dead man's characteristics was the way in which life took entire possession of him. He had the charm of the pagan, as Lady Victoria said, that *joie de vivre* which is as rare as it is delightful. It was impossible to think of Lord Shelford without that dominant trait. Surely the leaden stillness could have nothing to do with him! The shrouded room, the heavily perfumed white flowers, above all the cold hush brooding over the bed—there was something so unnatural in it all that it seemed impossible it could relate to so splendid a figure, so radiant a personality as Lord Shelford's. Yet,

little by little as Margaret gazed, her feeling slowly changed, and at last the knowledge that this quiet presence was indeed her friend laid hold upon her. The regular features had his expression, though their stillness was so awful ; the heavy black eyebrows were his, though the bright eyes were closed. Even the stark lines beneath the sheet recalled that handsome figure. The cruel sense of loss, which contrast makes so much more poignant, came upon Margaret ; that realisation of eternal distance that the peace of the dead brings to the living. She fell upon her knees and bowed her head ; she sobbed quietly and bitterly. For the first time his presence had been unaware of hers ; she felt the inevitable finality that the experience of death's unresponsiveness brings home to the young.

How much she had taken for granted ! How much more gratitude she could show if only it were not too late. But amid the unavailing regrets that the living feel when they see their dead removed beyond the reach of their love, when they know them untouched by the promises of better, more complete service which they now fain would yield, one thought inspired Margaret Hurst with courage. She had been true, both to him and to herself, and the suffering involved had been borne by her alone.

She stilled herself after a time and rose. She moved to where Elizabeth stood at the side of the bed where the light—such as it was—fell most

directly on the calm, inscrutable face, which had never been a very easy one to read.

‘ Dear child,’ said Elizabeth, ‘ I want to speak to you about him. You have felt his charm and his gifts of mind ; you have known his powers and his intellect. But you have also seen his goodness and his love. As you grow older and go about, you may hear him spoken against, even abused ; there are always people ready to belittle those whose energy and brains have wrung success from the world. You may even, Margaret, have to hear things brought up against him that are true ; he had more temptations than lesser men. But remember this. What you learn of a man from him himself is what concerns you ; as you knew him, so speak of him. Many will grant him brilliance and fascination ; most will own that his intellectual capacities touched greatness. But you have seen something that no one else has. The chivalrous devotion that a man of the world shows a young girl at the end of his life is one of the most touching sights there is. Towards you he has been perfect. Promise me two things—one for his memory and one for your own future. Will you always speak of him as you have seen him—as an honourable and honoured gentleman ? ’

Margaret looked full at Elizabeth, a new light in her eyes.

‘ I promise,’ she said, ‘ here and now. You will not doubt that I shall remember.’

‘ I don’t fear,’ answered Elizabeth. ‘ Now

promise me, too, that you will not blame yourself for the part you played in his life ; I, his daughter, do not regret it. You gave him much—all that you rightly could. His death does not lie at your door ; there is nothing in which you have wronged him. Be as true to his memory as you were to him. Take back this letter, which I found unopened on his desk, and remember that all is best for him as it is, and that he would not have had it otherwise.'

Elizabeth handed Margaret's letter, well knowing it had been written to save her father from a refusal. She watched the girl press her living lips to his dead forehead, as she would never have done had he been alive. She was a brave woman, but she was very tired. She had watched Lord Middlesex but an hour ago take her father's cold hand in his. She thought of her mother, so lonely in her reserved life, so soon forgotten after her early death, and the feeling that there was no one else to think of her gave the daughter an additional pang. She had given her father the service of love, while he lived she had not spared herself, but her resentment at her mother's fate was still unchanged. As she looked at his face in death she strove to forgive her father, but she could not do more than love him.

' Vain for him.'

(Yes, now all's over)

' Hand of man or kiss of woman.'

CHAPTER XXII

MARGARET GIVES HER HEART

ANOTHER December night was drawing on, dark and chill, as Margaret Hurst came into the little dining-room in Eaton Terrace. She had just finished having tea with Lady Saintsbury, and now Dr. Brown was with her, and Margaret was free. She held some letters in her hand that she meant to answer. She wore a plain black dress, and she looked a little worn ; it would have been easy to give her more than her twenty years. She had not fulfilled Lord Shelford's hope that she would grow less thin ; instead of that her cheek had lost much of its youthful roundness, and there were dark lines under her eyes. The black dress made her look even slighter than she was ; it was plainly made, and the only relief to it was a single row of beautiful pearls.

Instead of writing, Margaret sat down by the fire. As she did so her thoughts went back to just such an hour in that same room a year ago, when Roger Bamfield had asked her to marry him. Since Lord Shelford's death she had not seen him, though several notes, written in the old friendly

way, had reached her on her travels with Elizabeth. She had only been back in London for a few days, but she was settled now with Lady Saintsbury, to the old lady's exceeding satisfaction, until her parents' return. And Margaret thought—as she so often did—of that day which seemed to belong to such a remote past, but was in reality exactly two years ago—the day when she had learnt, also in that self-same room, that she was to continue without father or mother until the long months had come round as in time they must, and as now at last they had done. Very soon Mrs. Hurst would claim Margaret from her grandmother, and Margaret felt, with a real pleasure, that there would be regrets both on her side and on Lady Saintsbury's. The old lady's pity for the girl at the time of Lord Shelford's death had drawn them nearer together ; she felt that her granddaughter had lost a unique chance of a brilliant position, and this ranked in her eyes before all else. Luckily, she did not know that Margaret had decided against it, nor did the younger woman know the precise direction of her grandmother's feelings.

As the girl looked back she felt how much she had lived through in those two years ; how they had marked her life and changed it ; then again they seemed to have passed in one vivid flash. For the figure of Lord Shelford remained as before the dominating one of those wonderful months, and his vitality, his easy power, his joyful strength put other recollections in the shade. He showed

that love of living which is the last word of charm in a companion ; many men and women are afraid, as it were, of life, and do not lay hold on it with the masterful and eager hands of Thomas Shelford. Instinctively as she thought of him, Margaret's slim fingers touched the pearls about her neck, and for a moment she smiled tenderly. She remembered the day at Mallow—one of many such—when Elizabeth asked her help in that sad task that comes in a higher or lesser degree to each of us when death steps over our threshold. The two women worked together in sorting and ordering the possessions of the dead man ; in arranging with heavy hearts for others to carry on his interrupted labours, in burning with reverent hands his private papers, in keeping secret from prying eyes those personal things that belonged to him and to him alone. Elizabeth sat by the writing-table which he always used when he was not working officially ; as she opened and emptied drawer after drawer, the girl obeyed her directions—docketing here, destroying there, sealing up or collecting together, just as she was bidden. Suddenly Elizabeth passed her a packet on which was written, in Lord Shelford's peculiarly clear hand, the one word ' Margaret.'

' Open it,' said Elizabeth, ' I know nothing of it.'

Inside the paper was a jeweller's case, and within that was the row of pearls. Margaret found also a plain envelope, which she opened by Elizabeth's desire. She passed to her the receipted

bill, and as the two women who had loved him looked at it together, that wistfully maternal smile that is not confined to actual motherhood shone in both their faces. The bill was for eleven hundred and twenty-five pounds, characteristically settled by Lord Shelford for a cash payment of a thousand guineas. The little peculiarities of those whom we have loved and lost are more pathetic than their greater qualities, because they appeal familiarly to us and not to all the world.

‘It is your wedding present from him, Margaret,’ said Elizabeth, and she spoke of it no more. She kept the child with her through the long months of inevitable work which the death of so prominent a figure entailed. She still kept her when the time came that she could rest her weary eyes with change of scene, and the two women went abroad quietly alone, and watched over each other with anxious and loving care, cementing a friendship that each knew would last as long as life itself. Both had been strained up to the limits that their powers could endure; Elizabeth’s mainspring was gone, and Margaret’s grief would have been unbearable had she not had the merciful knowledge that Lord Shelford’s eyes had never seen her last note to him. She looked now at the drawer in her little writing-table, and knew that it lay there unopened; she knew, too, that she would never have strength to read it again. As she thought of her words about Roger, the colour flamed in her face; she had not lost the habit of showing

her emotions quickly. How had she dared to say that she would marry Roger? He had asked her in that very room on just such an evening as this, but it was twelve long months ago, and since the spring they had not met, and his letters had given no sign. And she loved him, loved him without the attraction of glamour to help her, loved him because he gave her what she needed, asking in return only what she had the power to give. She longed to pay the full price, to give up the second best which once she had thought was life itself. Lord Shelford's training had taught her—by their absence—the value of 'quietness and confidence'; his methods had savoured enough of the balancing of accounts to make her dread vaguely, even though she could not express the thought, anything that savoured of a bargain. He still remained the brilliant figure of her dreams; from his place, unique both in her heart and mind, no one could ever dethrone him. But he was not the chosen comrade of her days; he could not stay the hunger of her life with the food for which unconsciously her inarticulate cries arose. To eyes that could see, it was pitifully plain that Lord Shelford's love had awakened, in the girl he had chosen for his own, cravings which it was beyond his scope to satisfy, desires which it was beyond his power to comprehend.

Margaret Hurst sat on, trying to call to her aid the best gifts of her past, in order to make sure that her future should not be barren. And then

she heard a tread on the doorstep, and a ring, and she knew with that peculiar certainty which comes to us at moments charged with instinct and intensity that the ring was Roger Bamfield's. The next minute he was in the room, and their hands met in the silence that only friends can afford.

'Margaret,' he said at last, and then he stopped. 'My dear, my dear, how pale you look; tell me, has it been very hard?'

She raised her eyes to his, and smiled bravely.

'It might have been harder, Roger; he did not suffer, and he left life without having to bid it good-bye. Elizabeth feels more thankfulness than regret, and so do I.'

'He was a great figure,' said the man, 'and public life has lost its most attractive personality.'

Margaret's quick ear noted the perfect simplicity with which he spoke; Roger Bamfield was above dealing in *arrière pensées*. As he went on, there was no grudge against the dead man in his mind, and Margaret, who had learnt since Lord Shelford's death to dread the detracting praise of men who had envied him, listened with the foreknowledge that she should get no pain from what she heard.

'And for you the loss must be irreparable; no one can fill the peculiar gap which his death has left, because his rare gifts made friendship with him a privilege beyond the power of most men to create. You must have many precious memories of his kindness and the stimulating qualities of his mind.'

Margaret smiled happily.

‘I knew you would understand, Roger, you always do.’

Once more the man hesitated, and once again his speech came, fast and free, as it had done a year ago.

‘Margaret, won’t you let me understand everything, won’t you take what is yours? I don’t ask you to love me yet, only to give me the right to show my love; you cannot keep me from feeling it. Dear and sweet lady, let me serve you; in part, at first, if you will, and with increasing completeness as life goes on. Come to me, beloved, be my wife; together we shall find the peace of God.’

He stood before her, his eyes full of the fire of love, and Margaret knew that she had come at last to anchor. She rose too, and they stood fronting each other without speech or motion. Then the woman spoke:

‘Roger, I wrote Lord Shelford a letter which he never saw; I want you to read it now instead of him.’

She paused a moment, and then continued bravely in a stronger voice:

‘I wished him to know that my love was not for him, and I wrote it so that he should not ask for what I could not give. But he died before it reached him, and it was given back to me unopened.’

She went to her table and from its drawer she took a letter. She gave it into Roger’s hand and he looked at the superscription. She watched him timidly, and it seemed to her that he was long

in opening it. Then very quietly he moved to the hearth, and thrust it, unread, into the flames. Margaret started forward but it was too late, already the letter was destroyed. Roger took both her hands into his possession and spoke in tones of tenderness and joy, as he looked proudly at his love.

‘ Do you think that I need proof of what my lady tells me ? ’ he asked.

And as Margaret surrendered herself into the keeping of her mate, she knew that her spirit had found a home of which neither time nor space could rob her.

THE END

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